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ABSTRACT

This series of articles, focusing on the Western Torres Strait Islander people, presents the following: "A Brief Introduction to Torres Strait Culture" (Rod Kennedy); "Some Guidelines for Relating to Torres Strait Islanders" (Rod Kennedy); "One Mouth Two Hands" (Rod Kennedy); "My Trading Friend in the Village of Mari" (Charlie Gibuma); "Islanders: A Different Work Ethic" (Rod Kennedy); "Working Together, Helping Each Other" (Jerry Anau); "Meetings and Discussions: Contrasting Styles" (Rod Kennedy); "Excerpts from an Interview with Canon Dai on Consensus and a Common Project" (Rod Kennedy); "Grass Roots Bilingual Education: A Note of Caution" (Rod Kennedy); "Sitting on the Mat of an Evening--Helping Our Children" (John Peter); "Wife-Lending: Conflicting Values" ((Rod Kennedy); "Adoption and Marriage in the Western Strait" (Rod Kennedy and Judy Kennedy); "Feasts: Celebration or Obligation?" (Judy Kennedy); and "The Intermediary and Social Distance in the Western Torres Strait" (Rod Kennedy). Recommended readings on Torres Strait culture and an order list of available work papers are appended. Papers by Gibuma, Anau, and Peter are presented in both vernacular text and English translation. (Author/VWL)

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ADHA GAR TIDI: CULTURAL SENSITIVITY IN WESTERN TORRES STRAIT

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Series B Volume 14
January 1990

WORK PAPERS OF SIL-AAIB
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ADHA GAR TIDI: CULTURAL SENSITIVITY IN WESTERN TORRES STRAIT

ROD AND JUDY KENNEDY

(with the people of the Western Torres Strait)

Summer Institute of Linguistics
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WORK PAPERS OF SIL-AAIB

These work papers are being produced in two series by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Australian Aborigines and Islanders Branch in order to make results of SIL research in Australia more widely available. In general, Series A contains linguistic papers which are more technical, while Series B contains language learning, anthropology and literacy material aimed at a broader audience.

The work papers reflect both past and current research projects by SIL members; however, some papers by other than SIL members are included.

Because of the preliminary nature of most of the material, these volumes are circulated on a limited basis. It is hoped that their contents will prove of interest primarily to those concerned with Aboriginal and Islander studies, and that comment on their contents will be forthcoming from readers.

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A list of the volumes in both series, with their prices, is given in the back of this volume. You may order individual volumes, place a standing order or request notification of all publications by writing to the address indicated.

S. K. Hargrave
Editor

FOREWORD

This collection of articles is an expanded version of *Adha Gar Tidi*, first published in 1986 as Torres Strait Working Papers 2, Department of Pedagogics and Scientific Studies in Education, James Cook University of North Queensland. The inclusion of three new articles, revision of the original articles, and the new wider audience for the articles is very pleasing to me as editor of the first edition.

As a teacher on Thursday Island from 1968-1972, I always felt that it was difficult to find out about many aspects of Torres Strait culture. There is some material available, but not very much. Accordingly, when Rod Kennedy attended a workshop on styles of communication and learning in 1985 and shared some of his personal writings with me, I saw material which seemed to plug some of the gaps.

This in no way takes away from the Islanders' predominantly oral culture. One could sit with them and listen and learn. However, it takes much time, sensitivity and patience to gather information this way.

The papers by Rod and Judy Kennedy should assist in the process of listening to Islanders. Their papers display sensitivity to Islander culture and help to provide a backdrop for discussion with, and questions of, Islanders. Neither Rod nor Judy would claim that the papers are definitive, nor necessarily applicable to all Islander situations. Nevertheless, they do provide a place for newcomers to begin to understand the ways of their new hosts and hostesses.

Western culture places high emphasis on the written word; it is thus a good place for Westerners to begin to understand Torres Strait culture. However, application of the knowledge so gleaned is necessarily developed in social settings. In social settings the knowledge can be built upon: this method of building knowledge and skills of interaction is the one valued by the Islanders. So, in building understanding of Islander ways, it is essential to interact with Islanders.

These articles should assist you to do so with sensitivity.

Barry Osborne
James Cook University

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PREFACE

During the past thirteen years, getting to know the Torres Strait Islander people has been one of our greatest life adventures. The promises that the Islanders made to teach us their language and about their culture have been honoured with pride and warmth. So now we want to pass on some practical understandings that we hope will help towards mutual cooperation between Islanders and those of you who have the privilege of living and working with them.

Our experience has been among the people who speak Kala Lagaw Ya, the traditional language of the Western Torres Strait. That is the name as registered with AIAS in Canberra. But in the dialect spoken in the north western islands where we lived the name is Kalaw Kawaw Ya. You will see examples of this dialect in the vernacular versions of several of the articles in this volume. The language is officially classified as Pama Nungan, an Australian mainland group of languages, yet it is plain that the people of Western Torres Strait, their language and their culture, bear many similarities to others in the Melanesian region.

The name ADHA GAR TIDI has an associated history. It is a phrase unknown to many younger speakers of the language. Literally it means, "putting your body out" and it has the connotation of giving assistance unobtrusively, of noticing other people's needs and attending to them with a minimum of fuss. We wish to thank those many Islander friends who have helped us with a minimum of fuss.

You may find that the articles we have written do not quite match up with situations that you encounter. Please remember that Torres Strait culture is a culture in transition, and therefore no definitive description can be given. However, there are many important values that have remained stable and we trust that these notes will help you to develop a valid understanding from your own experiences with Islander people.

Rod & Judy Kennedy
Townsville, October 1989

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO TORRES STRAIT CULTURE

Rod Kennedy

The Torres Strait is special in Australia. It contains many people with a foot in two cultures. These people balance a strong commitment to local tradition with a businesslike determination to share in "useful" parts of wider Australian culture.

If you are a newcomer helping to bring some useful service, you will be working with Islander leaders. Most of these people are eager to be friends if they can possibly feel comfortable in your company and vice versa. Many Islander people have two strong felt needs:

(i) To upgrade their own communication skills with the "world outside";

(ii) To take pride in showing their own life and culture to you and through you to the world.

With eager hopes go fears of disappointment. The role of friend/host/local guide is very clearly defined and very important in the Torres Strait. If a local person sets out to be your friend but gets badly hurt doing so, that hurt will be felt deeply because the job has been taken seriously. The following highlights some important Torres Strait values and behaviour that you should know about, as you seek to be a friend.

Respect for People

There is a focus on valuing people. Possessions, time, and ideas are relatively less important in Torres Strait culture than is the case in Western culture.

Islanders have an amazing capacity to wait. From the Western viewpoint things that are out of balance or ideas that seem to have gone haywire **must** be attended to quickly. From the Islander viewpoint it is very often quite inappropriate to act until all the underlying relationships have been worked out and personal dignity is all taken care of. I feel that I can do no better than point you to Mr Charlie Gibuma's account, 'My Trading friend In The Village of Mari' (in this volume), to illustrate this point.

In just the same way that Charlie's trading in another village depends upon him having a stable relationship with a suitable person in that village, you too will need to depend heavily on stable relationships with the people within the Torres Strait who adopt you. Only as that relationship deepens in mutual trust will you be given a clear idea of how things are working out around you. It pays to make a big investment in building relationships of personal trust.

I have seen some real friction when white people with a job to do in a traditional community have spoken up very strongly for an important but abstract principle, such as the need for a certain standard of medical practice. Sometimes this speaking up strongly threatens the dignity of local leaders. Clearly in these instances Islanders tend to worry more about the personalities while Westerners tend to worry more about the abstract ideas or principles.

At first our Islander friends were very willing to tell us of mistakes we were making while trying to speak their language, but they were shy to tell us of mistakes concerning social interaction. I remember one occasion when I said of a nursing sister, a very pleasant lady who was probably about 60 years old, *na ngayapa kapu yoepkaz*. Literally the words mean, "To me she is a good woman". However, my young companion laughed and said, "Are you doing a line for her?" I had blundered into an idiom with a much stronger meaning than I intended. Thinking back though, I had used that idiom many times in situations that were not quite right for it. At first many of the Islanders were very backward about telling us things they saw as threatening our personal dignity. They didn't like to tell me that what I was saying sounded socially inappropriate. We have had to win the privilege of being told what people really think of us.

Facial Expressions and Body Language

It is also good to be observant of facial expression and body language. Many Islanders who have mixed quite a bit with whites feel that they have been quick to learn the white man's version of body language, but whites have been less sensitive about learning Islander body language and significant facial expressions.

If any of the following signs accompany a half-hearted yes, you can bet the yes really means, "Yes, that's what you say but I don't agree":

(a) **Eyes averted:** shows that the speaker has a different viewpoint but does not want to confront you with it;

(b) **Eyes partially closed:** indicates hostility;

(c) **The speaker hints that there may be some slight problem with your plan or suggestion:** this is an invitation to ask the speaker's advice. In so doing you will show sensitivity and respect for his viewpoint;

(d) **A yes that drifts away into nothingness, or has the word "maybe" tacked on:** this is just a polite way of saying, "probably not".

I'm quite sure that many times when I was making social mistakes, there were subtle little hints being given me but at first I was failing to pick these up. If an Islander friend knows that you want to learn about his beautiful and elaborate hand signal language and associated non-verbal communications, this will help him feel that you are a person worth getting to know.

Trust in Persons Rather Than in an Abstract Principle

This principle appears to operate in many small-scale cultures. Barry Osborne (personal communication) tells of his study of schooling among the Zuni people of North America. After they had got to know Barry they welcomed him to work among them. Towards the end of the study Barry asked, "Did you see that what I wanted to do would help your schools, your children?" The people replied, "No, we invited you because we trusted you and wanted to help you."

Along with this there goes an acute awareness of other members of the group, how they are thinking and feeling. Islander people generally discern these things by a skilful reading of body language and facial expressions.

Adoption and Strong Family Loyalties

From this value comes permanence of friendships. There is also a focus on the dignity of elders, on the closeness of peers, "brothers" and "sisters". Loyalty and sense of obligation focus strongly on one's own family with a more limited concern for strangers.

In the old days people in this part of the world were able to fit everybody into two categories, **relatives** and **enemies.** So traditionally adoption was the only way into a kinship culture. Adoption is still taken very seriously. Islanders offer to adopt a newcomer as a mark of willingness for a long-term, two-way commitment that involves advising, caring, giving and taking. It is not expected that you will turn your back on such an arrangement. Many newcomers have been thrilled upon entering another community to learn that their adoption carries over. Someone will come to them and say, "Well since my relative in that other community adopted you, you are my sister too." (Alternatively you may be an uncle, a child, a cousin etc.)

As a Westerner, you may not feel prepared for the obligations that such adoption can entail. Fortunately so long as you remain open to your Islander relatives, and your dealings with them generally run to something like a credit balance, it is largely up to you to say yes or no to each individual request for help. Islanders also allow adopted outsiders a fair measure of flexibility. They will readily realize that as a worker you are to help people of all clans. They have the good sense to realize that your relative independence of the local social situation gives you more freedom to serve the whole community in an even handed way.

It is good to note how often people refer to each other by role title (Mr, Dr etc.) or kinship title in the Torres Strait. This is true whatever language is being used, but for close friends, it is best to use the vernacular kinship terms, not Pidgin or English. Using just names is thought of as fairly unfriendly. Title plus name is fine where this helps to avoid confusion.

Group Work Ethic

The group work ethic is based on loyalty and closeness to "clan brothers" and to family. Whenever you see a group of people who seem as though they are not trying very hard to do those things you think they should be doing, suspect that you need to learn more about local values and motives. Look at the way Mr Jerry Anau of Boigu saw the system working when he was a child. He offers us many insights into a system of motives and rewards that functioned very efficiently for his people (see 'Working For Mutual Benefit' by Mr Jerry Anau).

My own feeling about the important issues Mr Anau raises is that the social vigour he speaks of is still there, but to some extent people have not had a sense of fulfilment in economic endeavours. People seek to fulfil themselves and strengthen their social ties through participation in important feasts. Preparation for feasting today provides the sort of social interaction that Mr Anau speaks of.

SOME GUIDELINES FOR RELATING TO TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS

Rod Kennedy

It is not possible to write a straightforward etiquette guide for a Westerner going to the Torres Strait. Islanders adapt their social behaviour quite a bit, tending towards Western customs in some more formal situations and being very traditional in others. But the following are some general guidelines for polite behaviour.

Greetings and leave takings. Pay close attention to greetings and leave takings. In some situations *Ngi mangiz* "you have come" would be a much better greeting than "Good morning". The greeting if you meet someone again later in the day is more likely to be *Wa* which literally means "Yes". The idiomatic meaning is something more like "Good on you, keep it up". *Yawa / yawo* is in common usage for "Goodbye". It is also the greeting that people shout if they pass at some little distance.

At a social gathering where you have been in conversation with someone, always take your leave with a brief word that you will now do such and such: "I might talk to Auntie Jane now."

Don't automatically expect to go inside people's houses when they entertain you. When an Islander welcomes you to enter his home, that may or may not involve entering his "house". He will want to take you to an airy comfortable place. He focusses upon the mutual honour implied in welcoming you to his land, not his house as such. If his loungeroom is relatively uncluttered and spacious, he will probably take you there. If he does not have a room inside that fits his requirements, he will seek to have a pleasant shade house in the yard. Or a tree in the garden with outdoor chairs may well be his "loungeroom". These are the normal places to sit and talk with guests.

Don't intrude at mealtimes. If you have not been specifically invited to eat with someone, avoid being an onlooker while he eats. Make your excuses and withdraw until the person has eaten. I realize that visits at mealtimes are also frowned upon in Western culture, but the prohibition is much stronger with Islanders; the historic cultural bases for food sharing and for caution in these areas run very deep.

Avoid situations where you are alone with a member of the opposite sex, if you wish only to be friendly in a general social sense. Traditional Islanders are a group oriented people and general interest discussions are held in a manner that is accessible to the group. Choosing to be alone with someone of the opposite sex is taken as a sign of romantic interest. Even sitting with someone at a small distance from a mixed group, or being the only member of your sex in a group, has this connotation. Check out the local expectations carefully. Inviting someone home for coffee implies more than just being friendly. It is good to relate to whole family groups, and such relationships can be an excellent safeguard against being misunderstood.

Adhere to standards of modesty. For women, clothing that reveals the thighs is considered provocative, especially inner thighs. (Islander ladies often take a towel or shawl with them to wrap round their knees if they feel that their dress will leave them a bit too exposed for comfort.)

Focus on the person in authority and his/her prerogatives. Don't neglect any of the leaders or elders who are important to your work and role. When your activities involve the rights and prerogatives of others, be fastidious about getting their authority for you to proceed. In some cases an Islander may readily hand over all prerogatives in an area to another person so long as he is first asked, thereby confirming that his personal rights have been considered. This is especially true of older people. Likewise respect an elder's landrights by taking the trouble to visit him on his home ground when appropriate. Freely acknowledge his prerogatives as a host, and his desire to be recognized as the host of significant activities. (For example, he may be delighted to have some activity for school children on his land, but ask him, not other family members.)

Share important information only with those who have a right to know. If your personal plans (e.g. length of your stay in a community) impinge on the responsibilities of an Islander official, be sure to tell him first. He will feel very ill used and consider that his authority has been undermined if he first hears of your plans on the grapvine. Avoid being an obvious onlooker if a situation likely to embarrass Islanders should arise, like the man who took a short detour so that he would not "see" two important men arguing.

Notices of bereavement must be shared with the correct people first. The means of breaking the news must be indirect, beginning with a speech in praise of the person who has died. During this speech the name of the deceased must not be revealed until enough gentle hints of his identity have been given. Try to leave it to locals to break such news but should you have to take up such a responsibility, go to a trusted leader who is not immediately involved. Initially you should share with him only in vague general terms. You should begin with the words, "I have just received some bad news. What should I do?" He will guide you from there and perhaps take the responsibility from you. BUT be sure to share specific information only as he urges you to do so. Don't embarrass a person by making him the receiver of information he has no right to hear.

Focus on the activities that the group sees as important at the time. Try to participate in main community activities. Make your apologies when it is not practical for you to join in even if the impossibility seems obvious to you, e.g. "If I didn't have to teach at the school today, I would like to be with you men preparing a shelter for the feast. Thank you for the important job that you are doing." Be prepared to yield when public events that you are organizing have a timetable conflict with a main village event. The locals are much more likely to fit you in effectively later if your PR work is good, and hopefully your activity will become a main village event in due course.

Uphold group values. If you wish to convince people of a course of action, emphasize its benefits to the group. And emphasize those benefits to the individual which will make him a more effective group member. For example, a young man is more likely to be impressed by the value of an economic activity if it is shown that it enables him to fulfil filial obligations better, to be a more effective member of his peer group.

Criticisms, where you must make these, should be understated and somewhat indirect. Naturally, if you are an administrator, you must urge some people to do things that they do not do voluntarily. The tactics for achieving this include having village elders and other leaders on side. Give plenty of warning about what you consider should be done in an atmosphere that does not overtly focus on any particular individual in a threatening manner. It is a standard cultural requirement among Islanders that points of agreement and praise must be cited first if you later plan to put points of disagreement and/or criticism. Some positive oratory is a good thing. If there is a real need to apportion blame, heap blame on the anonymous "someone" and "they". It is a well understood cultural idiom that such statements are meant to warn the malefactor without causing him to lose face.

Where there is conflict between you and someone else, work through a relative of that person who is far enough removed from him that this relative will not also lose face. Be aware that if someone knows that you have recently been critical, he will probably feel the need to avoid close contact with you for a few hours or a few days, or longer. Do not force yourself upon that person under these circumstances, even if he happens to be your employee or is otherwise under your authority. You may guide his work through intermediaries for a while. If after some time has passed you feel that you should hold out an olive branch, a small gift of food is traditionally a symbol of peacemaking.

While practically everything that I have said about criticism and taking a positive stance applies to Western culture too, the thresholds are different for different cultures. Levels of forcefulness that are acceptable in Western culture are not acceptable among Islanders. At the same time many statements by Islanders that something or other is wrong may hurt a Westerner, because Westerners have a very personal code of responsibility, and so take the complaint as a personal criticism when it should be taken as a general whinge. If you hope to be working with Islanders within their comfort zone, watch carefully how they work with each other.

Be alert to subtle criticisms. Adapt your perceptions to the (a) indirect ways and (b) forceful ways in which Islanders may offer you criticisms. In a working situation where there needs to be an effective two-way exchange, you may lose out if you fail to develop a close enough relationship to carry this important traffic of two-way advice. Islanders use lots of non-verbal communication at any time. Non-verbals are used even more when the speaker doesn't like having to say the things he is saying.

Islanders traditionally visualize the family more as a hierarchy than Westerners do. Working relationships were traditionally an aspect of family life. A boss is seen as having similarities to a father. An Islander may treat you as a very important person if he sees you in this light. In this case he will accord you a very high status and it may be hard to get him to make criticisms that you need to hear. If he looks upon you as being like a chief of another tribe and himself as an underling, it will be even more difficult to get close to him. As Islanders quite frequently accord high status to Westerners, it is often difficult to get truly realistic criticism of our actions from them. Remember that an Islander who wants to be courteous normally states criticisms very indirectly. Take care, for many of these criticisms are so subtle that we tend not to notice that a useful point has been made.

Conversely an Islander may see himself as having much greater status than you do, at least with regards to a particular role. In this case he will tend to act the big boss. Just as the person who casts you in an elevated role tends to emphasize status difference, so does the person who seeks to cast you in a lower role than himself. While he may not pass any personal criticisms of you according to his standards, many of the matter of fact statements he makes about how things should be may come over as criticisms of you. I have found that only a small minority of Islanders take such a stance with me, and in these cases there are often indications that these people have felt hurt by situations in the past that have been dominated by non-Islanders. Be prepared for the drastic difference between the very respectful manner of those who look up to you, and the manner of those who make a point of not doing so. I think that our own relatively egalitarian background causes us to feel confusion when such sharp differences occur.

Be aware of emerging "brother" relationships. For male workers in the Torres Strait, there is currently another trend in cross-cultural social relations that to me seems much healthier. It is becoming increasingly common for young and middle-aged Islanders who fill leadership roles within their own communities to interact quite vigourously with colleagues in a manner that has many similarities to the traditional peer group structure found within clans. (See Introduction in 'The Intermediary and Social Distance in Western Torres Strait', this volume.) When Islanders accept a Westerner as a professional colleague and friend, they tend to designate him also as a member of such a group of "brothers" whose relationship bridges across clan boundaries. Such a relationship dictates much closer and more egalitarian interaction, and there is a mutual exchange of banter that demonstrates the fitness of colleagues for group membership by challenging and testing that fitness. Many of the young to middle-aged Islander leaders treat Western co-workers as honoured but distant strangers until such time as the Westerner has demonstrated himself approachable but dignified. He can then be welcomed as an honorary brother in this emerging, supra-clan peer group where the old principles of clan brotherhood apply to a new and much more far-flung structure.

One of the clear indications that you are being considered for acceptance in this way is challenges to your person and role in the form of banter, and more or less light-hearted efforts to put down the value of what you are aiming to do. You are considered "to be doing OK" if you understand and enjoy the joke but keep a straight face. Your awareness and wits are being tested.

I see this as a healthy and much to be expected development. Because traditionally people within clans were closely interdependent, peers at this level interacted vigourously. Conversely, individual clans were traditionally very self sufficient, and cooperative interaction between clans was non-intrusive. Increasingly, sharing in Australian national and international life has made Islanders more interdependant beyond the clan level. Traditional, non-interventionist forms of supra-clan social interaction have come under great strain.

Rev. Joel Makar described this change in an apt and picturesque manner. Describing gatherings of clergymen past and present, he said, "When we gathered 10 years ago, we used to treat each other as though we were chiefs of different villages, but today we treat each other much more like brothers."

Recognize that Islanders are also adapting. This is an interesting feature of cross-cultural adaptation. The very culture that we seek to adapt to is itself adapting. It is useless to focus only on a static set of rules - Do's and Don'ts for another culture. We need to gain an understanding of the cultural dynamics. Then we will be able to move with the changes that take place, while still appreciating the cultural roots from which various developments spring.

Recently I encountered a classic example of such a change that still keeps in touch with its roots. An Islander lady on one of the outer islands who is both an efficient office worker and a holder of many traditional values was speaking to me by phone. She felt that she should tell me an item of "bad news". At the same time she kept the STD call fairly short. Nevertheless, as I thought over her words afterwards, each stage of the proper procedure was present in miniature. There was the euphemistic and vague initial statement, the words of praise for the person who had died, that after a sentence or two gave me a good idea of who it was, then the naming of that person, and an expression of concern and sympathy for the relatives. Under other circumstances (had I been a close relative of the one who had died), this lady would have taken each of these steps much more slowly. This lady has been able to retain cultural sensitivity, yet cope with the realities of living in the 20th century.

ONE MOUTH TWO HANDS

Rod Kennedy

The Pressures of Change

Peoples can only survive in this changing world if their culture is dynamic, if it adjusts to the ever changing situation.

My wife Judy and I see many of our good Islander friends wring their hands, almost overcome by a feeling of helplessness at the changes that confront their way of life. For example, the whole concept of offering hospitality is under a severe challenge. Because it is the Islanders' traditional ideal to live together in harmony with all their relatives, there is also an ideal of caring for every need of a visiting relative. The whole culture stresses the importance of people, especially of mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers. This is so much the case that when Islanders come to accept a total outsider as a person of goodwill towards them, they promptly adopt that person as a close relative.

Kinship and Hospitality

It was because the people of Saibai Island adopted us as kin that we were able to fit in with the community, to be helped and to give help, to learn and to teach. My adoptive relatives, especially parents, were not shy to tell me off when I needed that sort of guidance. They were good enough to tell me quietly that it was a gross social error on my part when I went to a father to complain that his son had smashed my measuring tape. "Please go to more distant relatives who can sort things out without anybody losing face," they suggested. So I was taught ways to live in the closeness of an Island community without stirring up hurts. In this context caring for the feelings of a relative (friend = adopted relative) matters far more than any abstract principle of justice.

We learned early what it meant to be cared for. Bishop Jamieson of the Anglican Church was good enough to take us with him on one of his visits. He recommended our work of translating the Bible to the local people and we were shown the same loving care and attention he was shown during his brief visit. After he left, the local ladies felt so responsible for our welfare that they wondered if they had to go on cooking meals and waiting on us. Fortunately, we were soon able to work out a less demanding relationship, but the principle of responsibility remained.

Because so much responsibility goes with the role of host, Islanders think hard about it before adopting an outsider. Government workers from outside who provide an important service (medical for instance) can sometimes feel very hurt if nobody from the local community offers them hospitality. In western society everybody in general shares a slight responsibility to offer a small amount of hospitality to such a visiting worker (before he flies out again on the plane). However with Islander culture there will either be someone who is totally responsible, or else nobody will be responsible.

New Times, New Tensions

This all or nothing responsibility can place a considerable social-emotional burden upon Islanders living in towns. In the old days visiting relatives were always welcomed. If there was a total commitment on the part of the host to share his food and shelter, there was total commitment on the part of the relative staying for an extended period to join his clan brothers (or her clan sisters) at work. A modern Islander living in town and working for a modest salary is still socially responsible to be open- handed and generous with his visiting relative, but there is seldom any opportunity for the visitor to offer help in return.

Many town-dwelling Islanders really don't know what to do about the problem of offering hospitality now that so little help comes in return. Some even avoid contact with relatives as this seems easier than facing them while at the same time denying the traditional commitment to unlimited hospitality. Others just give up hope of making things more comfortable for their own household. Many feel quite strongly that a long-term visitor/boarder should pay his board, but feel ashamed to make demands as this would be a break with the traditional way.

A Way Out

Cultures are dynamic. They resist change and yet under the social pressures that apply, continual change comes. It is quite common for Islanders to feel that nothing can be done to alleviate the life pressures that they experience. There is a feeling that to opt for change would be to let the side down culturally.

I believe that the Christian faith, when it is adequately adapted to Islander thought, provides a sound base for critical acceptance by the community of desirable cultural change. For an individual Islander to make unaccustomed demands upon a visiting relative seems to him to be somehow wrong, but a truly indigenous church is able to assist him to tackle problems like these in ways that are socially acceptable and effective.

MY TRADING FRIEND IN THE VILLAGE OF MARI

Mr Charlie Gibuma
Recorded and translated by Rod Kennedy

(For many years Mr Gibuma was chairman of Boigu Island. Here he tells the story of the close links that he has mantained with his Papuan associates.)

Before my time he was a friend of my father, a trading friend. His name is Old Man Kanag and he is the headman of Mari village. Later he and I have come to be close friends.

When harvest time comes I travel from here over to him and make gifts to him. Yes and I receive food from him. It is not done the way things go in a whiteman's store, where we walk in, buy what we want, then when we are finished we walk out. The storehouses on the New Guinea mainland are made of bamboo, and you may not just enter them at will. First you must go to your trading friend; he will say to you, "Hey! is that your face there?"

You will reply to him, "Yes, I'm doing fine at this time." He smiles at you then you go on chatting for a long time.

During the chat you say to him, "Oh, father, I have a few small things here. Would these be of any use to you?"

He replies, "Yes."

Then he does similarly for you. Then the cycle repeats itself. You give him something; He gives you something... Yes this is the way of our ancient custom, you must show great respect to him, putting yourself into a lowly position. He likewise shows great respect to you. This is the proper way of friendship.

Vernacular text:

NGAW ZANGU IGILAYG KAY MARINU

Ngawngu parunu ngaw thathi kulay igilayg aymaydhin zoengu igilayg nuy. Nungu nel Ol Man Kanag. Nuy sew goegathaw mamus. Wagel kay nuy ngawngu ngulayg asidhin a ngalbe igilayg kazi ayimoedhin.

Wara thonara ayngu thonar balbayginga ngay koezi nanga, ngath nuyn zapun poeyban. Wa ngayapa aydun kusuman. Ina kedha kuniya lawnga markay sawa lag midh nanga, ina wardh. Markay sawalag ngi uthemin nanga, ngalpa za barpudhan soeyzi, munasin kalanu adhapuydhan. Ina nanga thanamun sawalag Dhawdhaynu nanga moerapiw lag. Ngi kasa ubipa muya uthiz lawnga, ngi mamu nginu zoengu igalgoepa kulay, nuy ngibepa kedha muliz, "E, nginu paru sena?"

Ngi nubepa kedha muliz, "Wa, ngay matha ngoedhagidh kedha thonara." Nuy giw waliz, kalanu nginu ya soegul lak moegina kuykuthalnga.

Dhadhasin nanga ngipen moegina ya sagul, ngi nubepa kedha muliz, "Bab, ngaybiya moegina zapul itha niyaypa. Itha ngibepa balbayginga a?"

Nuy kedha muliz, "Wa."

Kalanu nuydh lak kedha za ayman ngibepa. Kalanu lak woergiya thayan, ngi nubepa poeyban za; nuydh ngibepa poeyban za. Wa ngalpan kulba pawa lak kedha, ngi ngaru nubepa koeyma apasin, mulupa nubepa. A nuy lak kedha ngibepa koeyma apasin. Mina igalgaw pawa kedha.

ISLANDERS: A DIFFERENT WORK ETHIC

Rod Kennedy

To some, Torres Strait culture may mean traditional dancing, singing, and feasts with a flavour all of their own. These are the things we commonly call cultural activities. But if we are to consider the culture as a whole, we need to think about the ways that culture has of handling the host of everyday situations as well.

Motivations for Work

In Western cultures, a primary incentive for increased work is increased pay or benefits. Perhaps you go to work simply because you enjoy it, but most of us in Western cultures need a push to get us going in the mornings. We wouldn't be motivated at all if we didn't get paid for our work.

In Torres Strait culture, work appears to be socially motivated. Rather than working mainly to get money, Islander people work mainly because of the way they are related to those around them in the work situation.

The Importance of Team Work

If you have ever watched a lively team of young Islander men in a hurry to unload cargo, you must have been impressed by the joking and ribbing and by the competition to keep up with the group. In fact the whole operation needs the fatherly oversight of an older "relative", an uncle to most of the workers. Uncle needs to have a care that the flour tins don't get dinted too badly. He welcomes the football team atmosphere but moderates it, so the task is accomplished. (See case studies 14 and 15 in 'The Intermediary and Social Distance in Western Torres Strait', this volume.)

Gangs of Torres Strait Islander railway workers have been noted for their hard work under difficult conditions across North Australia. I believe that this is because they were free to work in their own way, urging each other to contribute to the group effort. Dr Jeremy

Beckett (personal communication) suggested that immediately after the Second World War Islanders sought to demonstrate by their effective work in groups that they were not inferior to non-Islanders. Under strong urging from an older relative they sought to outdo the white workers on the railways and in the pearling industry to show that they could effectively replace the departed Japanese workers. This latter was done at considerable personal risk, due to lack of experience with diving suits. Dr Beckett says that considerable pressure was applied by the group leaders to uphold the honour of the group. Social rather than economic factors were in focus.

I spoke to a friend who had found young men from the Torres Strait to be excellent workers in a plant that made pre-stressed concrete sections. The same sort of football team atmosphere prevailed with a certain amount of light-hearted ribbing of anyone who failed to keep up.

In 1981 I spent a weekend with a young college student from the Madang Province of Papua New Guinea. From talking to him it seemed that his background culture is very similar to that of Torres Strait. We talked about the imperative on all the clan brothers to join in and to go hard at it when the time came to clear a new piece of scrub to plant food crops. I asked him, "What would people think of a clan brother who didn't join in?" His answer was prompt and straightforward: "Em less man yet." (Meaning, he would be thought a lazy useless fellow.)

Distinctive Social Structure within Work Group

One of the leaders at St Stephens Anglican Church South Townsville had a very important comment to offer. (He preferred not to be named as the Islander code demands that people be cautious about pushing themselves forward as individuals.) This gentleman had worked for many years in gangs made up wholly of Islanders. He said that in Islander gangs the whole group worked as one. With so many people doing things so closely together, hand signals and facial expressions are vital to smooth cooperation, or else people would get hurt with the heavy gear or work would lose its pace. He spoke warmly of one white man now retired who had been the only one working in an Islander team. He knew the Islander code so well that he fitted in perfectly.

The same church leader today works in a gang as the only Islander among whites. He feels happy and confident because he knows the code of the group. He finds that the white group has a different set of signals to communicate; he understands the signals well and feels at home. One big difference is that the group of white workmen tends to operate as several smaller groups, pairs for instance. On the other hand he has seen several mixed work groups where such mutual understanding was lacking, and the groups could not work efficiently. I find it an interesting thought that each group of workmen is a miniature society in its own right with its own code of good manners etc.

Islanders in the Australian Work Force

We are fortunate to have in Townsville several thousand people from the Torres Strait. They have a long tradition of working hard and effectively according to their own social pattern, and white Australians should respect this approach to work. In a number of instances Islanders and whites have cooperated and have more or less blundered on a formula that meets work goals and aspirations on both sides. Yet often cooperation has not been as smooth because the motivation to work effectively has got lost somewhere in the tangle up of cultural differences.

I'm sure that many Islanders want to continue to work on the railways, but it would be a great shame if that were the only employment available. We need to be modifying work situations so that different groups of people can fit in effectively, feel at home, and truly give of their best. Islanders with a strong traditional orientation can work most effectively under the following conditions:

(i) Close social contact with their clan brothers.

(ii) A respected member of their own group as a foreman or in management.

(iii) A strong sense of belonging with personal authority and responsibility to fill some clearly defined role.

Unfortunately much of this runs counter to what we find in many Australian work situations. There has been an unfortunate tendency to be complacent and to say, "Well, the social situation in our work places is far from ideal; we cannot expect workers to do very well." I suspect that it is not just Islanders who find social conditions of work difficult.

If the government takes a paternal attitude and offers plenty of jobs to Islanders without much concern for good morale, motivation, or productivity, workers will give very little and in the long term get little in return. Government and private employees need to understand Islander incentives for work. They must consider social relationships in the work place if they want happy, productive workers.

WORKING TOGETHER, HELPING EACH OTHER

Mr Jerry Anau of Boigu Island
Recorded and translated by Rod Kennedy

Very long ago in my grandfather's time he was at first a warrior. This involved not just my grandfather, but all that generation. This was the way they helped the village and its people, to prevent the fierce hordes (from the west)[1] from attacking and killing people.

When the fighting ended, from then time passed and their children grew up. My father became a carpenter in that generation.

In those days a great peace prevailed and people went about their work without fear of attack. They made large gardens with their digging sticks.

In those days my father became a carpenter. They worked together and built many houses. Their timber was the white mangrove, just like you see in our old church. They had few of the white man's nails. They carved pins from the white mangrove and these were used as nails. They were even able to make upstairs bedrooms with these techniques. They had some iron roofs but others were made of coconut, and some of blackpalm fronds. Some floors were made from white mangrove but others were of blackpalm.

In those days they did not work for wages but they did duty. Their Council days were Tuesday and Friday[2] while their mission day was Wednesday. All the village people worked together, men and women, not one would stay away.

The women always prepared food; it is also an important custom that those who come together to work should eat together afterwards. Along with that custom went the dancing, a brief celebration to share joy at the achievements of the day. In the same way house builders were not paid in cash, they helped each other in their turn. When a house was complete it was a time of great rejoicing, a feast would be held.

They worked very vigorously in those days, they were very strong. The foods at their feasts were the fruit of their own labours, and that feasting was the thing that lent strength to the work by causing men's hearts to take joy in their work. They shared all their productive labour with other people; gardens were planted together, their house building was done together. Their work ethic was one of mutual cooperation.

Today then this mutual help principle is relatively weak. It will be a good thing if we bring those old days to bear on the situation of today to strengthen the life of today and to help people. If we observe these old principles we will do well in building up our village, and helping people. The core principle here is that our people need to be of one heart and not heading off in all directions of thought.

NOTES

1. During the nineteenth century there was a significant eastward canoe migration of people from what is now Irian Jaya along the southern coast of Papua. Fear of these warlike people was such that several Papuan coastal villages were moved inland. The Boigu people too found that their village life was considerably disrupted.

2. Council Day: In earlier times people on the reserve settlements of the Torres Strait were expected to contribute one day of work per week to the local council. Similarly, mission day was the day on which a church working bee was regularly held. In earlier times I believe that attendance was pretty much mandatory.

Vernacular Text

KIDHAKIDHAN IBUPUYDHAY ZAGETH

Mina kulay thonar nanga, ngaw powpu nuy kulay koewbu mabayg nungu thonara. Senabi ngaw powpu lawnga, mura senabi maykuyk. Kuyk miyay, sena goegath ibupuydhaypa mabaygal sitha muynu, thugerngu mangayle, mabaygoengu mathamoeyle.

Na nanga koewbu muwasidhin nanga, misnarel mangaymidhin, lak koewbuginga kalanu. Sizi nagapa thanamun kaziw thonar aymaydhin. Ngaw thathi karpenta senabi maykuykoenu muynu.

Sethabi goeyginu mina kapu pawdh nidhaydhin, a mabaygal akaginga zageth ulaypu. Thana kapu koey apaw lagal aymoeydhin sethabi thonara puy pabun.

Sethabi goeyginu nanga ngaw thathi karpentaw zageth gasamoedhin. Thana koey garsar lagal kalmel moeydhamoeypu. Thanamun kow lagaw moeydhay puy waza amu

ngoedhe kedha ngoeymun kulba yoewthanu muynu. Markay nilay kasa moenarimayl. Thana ngulayg pinaw nilay uzimayparuy. Kedha pinaw nilay amuaw sakal. Thana lak ngulayg gimaw rum moeydhayle uthuy lagoepa. Wara thanamun thodhal ayniw thodhal, a wara mudhiw thodhal, a kudhu thodhal. Thanamun pulawal kedha, wara amuwaw pluawal a wara buru puluwal.

Sethabi goeyginu nanga manipa zagethoeginga, thana duti madhin. Thanamun kawnselaw goeyga Tewsday a Priday, a misnariw goeyga Wensday. Sena mura goegathaw mabaygal kalmel zagethan meparuy, garkazil a yoepkazil, wara mabayg yaw pugayginga.

Thana yoepkazil mura thonar ay giya palan kuyk wara koey pawa kedha, mabaygal mura urapun doegapa zagethoepa a kalanu ay kalmel purthan. Sena kedha pawa mina poewaw pawa. Sena kedha pawa na ayman nanga ngaru moegina sagul ayman kubilu, ika gasaman senabi goeygiw zageth. Thanamun lagaw moeydhay zageth lak kedha, manipa lawnga, thana kidhakidhan ibupuydhay zageth ayman. Lag na muwasin nanga koey ikalnga dhiwalnga, mabaygal koey ay ayman.

Sena kulay zageth nanga thana koey zageth ayman, thanamun moegaw koeyza. Thanamun pistingaw aydel thana lak thanamun zagethoezinga. Senabi pisting nanga, sena nuyn zageth magaw palan a mabaygaw ngoenakapoepa ika dhiw thayan senabi zagethoepa. Thana senabi zageth mura saya maypa wara mabaygoepa; nagu kalmel ayman a lagaw moeydhay kalmel ayman. Thana kidhakidhan ibupuydhay sagul siyampa.

Ina kaybaw goeyginu nanga kedha pawa mina moegina. Ina kayib lak matha ngoedhagidh kedha kulay goeyga ngapa maypa koepa ridh palan, mabaygoepa ibupuydhaypa. Ngalpa bangal nanga in kulay goeygiw pawa na manine nanga, ngalpalpa matha ngoedhagidh ngalpan goegathoepa moeydhaypa, a mabaygoepa ibupuydhaypa. Muynu sena mepa mabaygaw urapun ngoenakapoepa aymoeypa, lak koey garsar gizu aymoeyginga.

Islander men gather for a meeting.

MEETINGS AND DISCUSSIONS: CONTRASTING STYLES

Rod Kennedy

In the following I have tried to set out some of the differences in style that make it hard for Islanders to feel at ease in public meetings with Westerners. Social styles for holding a discussion vary enormously for different groups of people, and these differences in style can cause us to feel angry or insecure when off our home ground. If you were brought up on meetings where discussion was free and informal, you may find it off putting when people follow 'Roberts' Rules of Order' to the letter. Different ethnic groups can show preference for very different styles of discussion. Consider these differences between Westerners and Islanders.

Abstract Analysis vs. Concrete Wholeness

Westerners tend to focus the attention of a meeting on numerous ideas, many of these being abstract ideas. Islanders tend to focus on a broader plan for a group of people. In this context the feelings and reactions of the people of that group are very important. The Islander tends to want to see the whole picture. The Westerner in a discussion group totally dominated by Islanders can feel that the discussion fails to take enough account of alternatives and sticks too close to the current situation.

Islanders tend to stay out of discussion groups dominated by Westerners. I know that they tend to feel uncomfortable. From my experience of Islanders' styles of discussion, I suspect that the Islander feels that ideas expressed by Westerners don't belong to anything real. He is acutely aware of a lack of wholeness and concreteness at a level he can relate to. I know that many of the Islanders in Townsville, for instance, are concerned for their children's education yet few go to parents and citizens meetings. I suspect that one of the reasons for this is the discussion of abstract issues rather than personalized events. Other issues of minority status and historic white paternalism are probably also involved.

Debate vs. Consensus

Here are some of my observations of the way discussions are conducted in the Islands. Whereas Westerners think of discussion and debate, a vote, a winner and a loser, Islanders focus on consensus. We Westerners think nothing of expressing opinions quite strongly contrary to those of the previous speaker; discussion and debate go hand in hand. To an Islander brought up to be so respectful of the other speaker and the things he has said, this kind of bald disagreement can be extremely hurtful. Of course Islanders put different points of view, and in a culturally acceptable way strive to gather support for their own opinions at the expense of other opinions, but there is a background of sensitivity to other persons.

With an Islander speaker, many expressions of agreement with the previous speakers must be made before any effort to express a slightly different point of view. When a different point of view is expressed the speaker is usually at pains to present it as a compatible addition to the previous speaker's views, not as a rejection of them.

Outsiders attending a meeting run Islander style tend to feel bored unless they realize the purpose of subtly different repetitions. Those in the know will be listening carefully for slight differences in viewpoint between these similar presentations by succeeding speakers. Comparison can be made with any sport, such as football. Football may be boring to an outsider ignorant of the subtleties of the game, but fans would hardly agree that once you have seen one goal scored you have seen them all. So, commentaries of football games, though very repetitive, are not seen as repetitive by fans of the code. Rather the subtle differences add colour and insight to the description.

Social Rank and the Right to Forceful Expression

Expressions of agreement with the preceding speaker are especially important in Islander meetings when that speaker is of high rank. Similarly, the higher an Islander is in social rank, the more forcefully he can put his own point of view. Because Westerners are used to expressing their viewpoints rather forcefully, especially as it appears to Islanders, we come across as putting our own rank in society very high and the rank of the other speakers - the Islanders - as very low. Unless the Islander has a very positive conception of himself as a dominant leader, he will probably accept our forcefulness quietly and have little to say. In other words, because he feels put down he clams up, and likely makes a mental note not to attend the next meeting.

If he feels that his role in the situation should be a very dominant one (perhaps he is leader of the local community), he will be most surprised at the indignity of the assault on his expressed judgement. He may feel that discussion has been suspended and that it is time that he "blew the socks off" this outsider who makes bold to come in and insult him. Naturally the outsider, if he is used to Islanders accepting dominance quietly, gets quite a surprise. He finds it hard to see why discussion was suddenly suspended. If we fail to understand the underlying assumptions made by other speakers in a discussion, we may well be rude to them quite by accident, and certainly this causes people to withdraw from each other. Often each fails to understand why the other found the situation hurtful.

Discussion in the Classroom

Westerners are rather partial to the Socratic teaching method. The teacher asks questions even though she already knows the answer. As little Johnny's well-known question puts it, "Miss, do you ask me because you want to know, or because you want to know if I know?"

Many Islanders find the Socratic teaching method threatening. To begin with, they see teachers as high status people compared with students. That means that students should be very wary of saying anything that the teacher may not agree with. So the student is afraid of saying something that may affront the teacher.

The Islander student is also afraid that he may express a view that distances him from his fellows. Socratic type questioning in the classroom demands very public pronouncements, and Islanders never like to stick their necks out. They want to go into a huddle first with their peers to find out what others are thinking. After the huddle, it then feels great to be able to tell the teacher, "We think. . ." Classroom teachers need to think seriously about planning for this huddle stage, basically a lecture by the teacher followed by tutorial group activity when students can work out their opinions together before submitting their answers to the teacher. There is a security in this togetherness. If the teacher insists on an individual answer rather than group response, the Islander student feels he is being dissected in a very personal way, as the teacher dissects his answer.

Discussion times in the classroom are also important because they provide opportunity for the students to creatively restate the ideas they have absorbed. They can make the ideas truly their own. For Islanders, this restatement is often most meaningful in art form. They especially enjoy communicating ideas through drama. Western teachers need to appreciate and provide opportunity for this important learning/teaching method in Islander schools.

This paper does not set out to deal in detail with formal teaching situations, but I add the comment that in such situations a close, two-way sharing relationship with Islander teachers is invaluable. It has become obvious to me that numbers of local people employed as teacher aides, for instance, are also making an enormously valuable contribution as cross-cultural consultants. By standing in this important bridging position, these people carry quite a workload, involving a variety of unique tensions.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH CANON DAI ON CONSENSUS AND A COMMON PROJECT

Rod Kennedy

The following excerpts from an interview with Canon Dai (now Bishop Dai) are of great interest to me becuse they record his thoughts on restoring cooperation in a project involving the whole community. Under such circumstances the felt need for consensus is very great. To proceed with arrangements before consensus has been restored is to risk serious insult to any whose role in the community indicates that they should have been consulted. I was heavily involved with Canon Dai in the organization of a local video production including Bible drama and a number of cultural items. During one of his absences from the community some confusion had arisen. The following is the advice he gave me about wise procedures to follow.

One very significant feature about the drama project was the determination by the ladies of the local church Mothers' Union to act upon their very real concern for husbands and children. While they saw themselves as having an organizational structure which catered for their own need for concerted action, they made a deliberate decision to be involved with the men and younger people rather than isolating themselves. This caring decision was made in the knowledge that smooth social organization is much harder to achieve in a newly formed or ad hoc group that lacks some of the precedents for leadership interaction. This is all the more so in a socially conservative culture where the risk of violating someone else's role expectations is quite a serious thing.

The interview was conducted in the local language, Kala Lagaw Ya, but only the English translation is given here. Anyone interested in a copy of the vernacular transcript can write to me.

Rod: Sometimes we have a project that involves the whole community. How do we seek consensus here in the Island?

This is the way it is, we need to look deeply into things, the lifestyles of the young, and of older people, and the behaviour patterns of each group. If we look at things in this way, things should go well, with all sharing a common desire for one goal.

Rod: What should we do if a meeting has been held to organize things and on the surface there seems to be agreement but it soon becomes obvious that there are some important people within the community who are not at all satisfied?

Sometimes as we plan an event, a play for instance, some small problem may arise, but something that could spoil the show, to cause its cancellation. If the problem is sorted out privately among those concerned, then the people will feel satisfied. The problem will be quickly sorted out and people will come together as one, then the show will proceed well.

Had you seen this show in the first place that the ladies of the Mother's Union put on, you would have seen what a good show it was; however, it was done by the ladies alone. At this time they want the men and the women to put on the drama together.

Sometimes when the people all gather, the elders and the young, we all talk together (lit: mouth to mouth). Then we see things put right, we become as one. This is important to do because there will be various little feelings of confusion or resentment. We see these things talked out; people arrive at a unified idea and one feeling. When this comes about we will not be growling at each other; in such an atmosphere the project would be greatly weakened. If we proceed in a gentle way, gradually, then the thing will be done well, the way of mutual affection, with people all in agreement. The thing is done well, with gladness and joy.

Rod: What about a meeting where consensus is only superficial?

When there are tensions, they do need to be sorted out. If you do not put things to rights, the trouble remains there hidden (lit: inside). The thing needs to be talked out, put right and negative feelings got rid of. There needs to be the opportunity for people to say, here, "This is the thing that we are not satisfied with, this, this, and this." Should we have problems, this is the way they must be put right. Then things will go well.

It is just as when you go to confession, to the priest in the church, and you are able to get rid of your sin.

Rod: Are there secret ways in which an important community member can exercise influence if he feels his/her wishes have not been noted as they should have been?

If consensus has not been well enough established, and you see real internal problems in spite of "official consensus", then those leaders who are at odds, you should ask them to come together quietly, in private. No, don't call all the people, if you do, those community leaders who have negative feelings towards one another will be very ashamed should these things be aired in front of everybody. As I said this is very much like the principle of privacy where you go to confession to the priest, and God forgives all those things; you must gather only those senior people themselves, and just among themselves the thing should be cleared up.

Rod: Would it be fair to say that consensus and sorcery in the old way of life were opposites? Did sorcery stand for private self seeking in spite of the wishes of the group?

Yes, as I have told you, in the past they did things that way. When bad things happened, they would turn to their magic; we call it *maydh* in our language. It was this way: if you could just say the words, then the magic things would all take place for you. You would receive the help. So if things were going badly for you, this thing would help you to receive your wish.

Rod: Was this the sort of wish that he would share with everybody in the meeting, or a secret wish?

The thing (sorcery) would be just for him. No, he wouldn't do that thing together with everyone because sorcery is a secret thing.

Rod: Why did I have difficulties over consensus?

Sometimes everybody has "agreed" on something but then only some take part in necessesary preparations. What about those who stay away? Well some may have real reasons, but others who just say they are tired, or have a headache, just don't have a real wish to take part.

[NOTE: Of course the issue of whole community participation has a very different significance in a consensus culture. The pulling back of sections of the community will quickly undermine the confidence of those taking part.]

Sometimes if certain of the young people fail to turn out when expected, it may be some real incident has prevented them from coming, or they may just not really want to be involved. It is quite important for you to chat with these people. [The very fact that they broke an arrangement may cause them to feel shame in your presence and therefore to avoid future practices.] Quietly find out just why they have pulled back, and hopefully you can clear up the problem, and restore a good feeling between you. Then such people will be happy to come back.

Sometimes a person who has been quite faithful in practising is suddenly induced to withdraw by a friend or relative. The relative might say, "Hey, those of us who live in this vicinity are all withdrawing." In such a case the leader needs to look into it to find out the reason for failure in motivation. There may be some very simple reason that he can quickly set to rights.

In a case where you are an outsider, a white person, but a very close friend of Islanders. Suppose that on another occasion when you go to a previously close friend to chat or to ask a favour he doesn't really show you his face (tends to look away, or in other ways conceals his true feelings). When he looks at you it is with small (partially closed) eyes. These things give a fair indication that he is not so friendly. Well if this happened to me and I continued to get the message that he doesn't feel friendly towards me, then I need to go to him, and sit with him. [I guess that this implies sitting there for quite a long time.] First just chat, then I will bring up the point at issue [lit: bring a thing to him. Unsure if this means bring a gift or raise an issue; either could be appropriate.] When he understands,then he is likely to say, "Sorry, brother," or it might be "Sorry son. The reason I was upset was, thus, thus." This may be quite a small point and then things will go well.

Rod: Is it good to give presents when you are trying to restore friendship?

If you have not at first been successful in affecting a reconciliation, do not give up. Friendship is an important thing. It is no good that you two should be sitting in separate places (i.e., that there be a division between you). Look for a way to win that friend back. If you have failed in your attempts to sit with the person, you might give him a small gift,something he would like, suit it to his heart (wish), give him a watch, a pen, a book, or a picture. You might give a religious book. You give it to him and your gift can bring him round.

Rod: Does new tension bring oblique references to old wounds? I sometimes got the impression that suggestions such as the choice of a hymn to be used in a play were rejected because of the person who made them. That person could have been out of favour even though the hymn was quite suitable.

Sometimes it will be the case that someone will make a suggestion, "This would be a suitable hymn." Well if this is moved in the correct way, well and good, the suggestion will be accepted, and the hymn used. Sometimes though the way the suggestion is made is not appropriate, and that would spoil the show. Both the item suggested and the way in which it is suggested must be appropriate, then things will go well. [My understanding is that when Canon Dai says "not appropriate" he is referring especially to speaking out of turn, or not waiting for the apropriate authority person, the choir leader perhaps, to ask for people's opinions.]

Rod: What about the need to be very respectful to elders? And is it good to speak strongly to the young?

I tell you, Rod, I believe this very strongly. The way of life of the young people today has changed. The people of old times were respectful, they studied (our customs) well, and they worked well. But with the present generation of young adults and the children now, as we try to provide a steadying influence on them today, their words are few (surly). The reason for this is that they are short tempered (lit. hearts are short). Within the young people there is a lot of anger. Here is my word to the young people: Learn well. Here today things go well for you. We the older generation have the words (of wisdom) but we lack strength. Well you have the strength. It will be well for you to learn from us language, customs, and the proper way of life. If you do this, things will go well for you. But if you are not willing to learn from your elders then you will have nothing but strength, you will lack wisdom, and for that reason things will be bad and you will be short tempered.

Rod: Is there need in the light of conditions today to be less directive of the young, to try more to win them?

Yes as we seek to truly lead them by the hand, the younger people, it is our desire that each one come to grasp the true ways, and learn them. Then he will live well. We seek to win him so that his life will go well.

GRASS ROOTS BILINGUAL EDUCATION: A NOTE OF CAUTION

Rod Kennedy

For the past twelve years Judy and I have worked very intensively on literacy and Bible translation in the Torres Strait. During this time I have been very gratified to have a warm working relationship with others who have a major concern in this area. First with Mr Ephraim Bani whose orthography we were pleased to follow. We have worked with Mr Dana Ober and his associates; with the School of Australian Linguistics, Batchelor, N.T.; TAFE College, Cairns; and Thursday Island High School. Most important of all we have been privileged to work closely with communities in the Torres Strait.

I am quite excited that numbers of activities in the Islands are growing up in response to a felt need for cultural resurgence and vernacular literacy. There is a felt need for more, and more varied, use of vernacular in church services. Traditional stories are being recorded. More is being done with song and drama. Proud parents are reading letters in the vernacular that their youngsters have sent home from boarding school. I believe that if literature and the processes of reading and writing are loved and well used in the homes of the Torres Strait, children from these homes will be better equipped for schooling and their lives beyond schooling. I believe that we must make it a prime concern to foster these grass roots developments.

In the light of these important developments, we need to be careful that the introduction of a highly structured government scheme does not detract from local community initiative. Even the expectation of the introduction of such a scheme could detract.

I say "could detract" advisedly because my experience in the Torres Strait has made me cautious but optimistic that with appropriate respect shown to those leaders who are involved with vernacular literacy, both Westerners and Islanders can be effective in mutual encouragement rather than discouragement. The key to success is the respect and sensitivity shown for the persons and for the roles of the various authority figures.

Islanders can be almost as hurt if an outsider comes in and reacts "in a threatening way" towards a white authority person in whom they have put their trust; it is as if the emotional threat were directed towards themselves or an Islander leader. There are excellent culture-based reasons why people in the communities of the Torres Strait need to set up elaborate and well defined sets of authority roles before a novel project can be indigenized effectively[1].

In Torres Strait culture all sound principles of behaviour are perceived as being invested in the persons of authority. The authority that derives from being extremely knowledgeable about the old customs is personally vested in different elders. Immediate juniors to these elders, though very knowledgeable in the culture, are not willing to usurp the role of those who are extremely knowledgeable. Islanders know well that they will bear heavy criticism from many of their fellows if they are held guilty of role usurping. Role usurping is thought of as taking responsibility from the person who really has the right to take that role. It is quite a serious insult to the proper office holder. But when the proper lines of authority and responsibility are observed, people are happy to be called upon to perform their special roles and the whole process seems to reinforce interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand it is quite obvious that real problems are possible where novel activities are proposed, and where the realities of time and tide demand a capacity to adjust role expectations fairly quickly. Some up and coming Islander administrators tell me that they have a strong felt need to see those chosen to deputize for them grow increasingly into this role. For administrators who wish to share power and responsibility in a constructive way, it is quite a tricky business to inspire the confidence that will lead to an increased freedom within a valid indigenous structure. I believe that these people will with patience succeed in the dynamic task of keeping their indigenous organizations abreast of current needs. However, this sort of delicate operation will not be helped if outsiders with little orientation to local values and needs blunder in.

Given a great social need to have roles well defined and to follow these role guidelines carefully, Islanders feel the need for consensus meetings of quality. Such meetings make them feel secure. This consensus can give an Islander the backing he needs to step forward boldly and to take up novel roles. This is especially true in a hierarchical situation or where cooperation is needed between different clans or communities. This kind of common commitment, which is so vital to progress, can be fragile. If, in spite of words of consensus at a meeting, those put forward to take up significant roles feel intimidated or unsure of their backing, it is almost impossible for them to proceed effectively on a community-wide project. They may fear that some significant leaders have not been satisfied with the degree of consensus and may secretly undermine the project. Or they may fear confrontational behaviour by westernized thinkers. Both are serious threats to role accomplishment.

Unless we Westerners accept the significance of effective consensus within Islander communities, we cannot begin to understand the sorts of pressures faced by Islander administrators. A high status Islander can plan to do many things in isolation, but these will yield little in the way of positive effect. For the most part, even senior community members are very secretive about their thoughts on most novel issues with whole community implications. They find it much safer not to own any opinion until they have opportunity to watch how consensus is developing. Those who know well the realities of the social climate in traditional communities have good reason to postpone action on some issues. It just isn't worth it to go out on a limb.

On the other hand, the natural requirements of survival have, for hundreds of years, motivated Islanders to work at it till there is a quality consensus. Having reached effective consensus in an atmosphere of mutual love and trust, Islander culture has amazing power to concentrate on the event in focus. Lots of human and other resources can very quickly be poured in to produce smooth and quick success.

Often in the present contact situation Westerners and traditional Islanders have to share responsibility for one task. It is vital that the sociology of compromise worked out be appropriate. It must provide room for people of different backgrounds all to feel that they can make an effective contribution. One real danger is that the Westerner may grow impatient and declare, "Look, something just has to be done immediately." It is very hard for me to avoid reacting this way in many situations. I have been conditioned to regard prompt action as a birthright. The problem is that my impatience can inhibit the awakening of a dormant giant. The whole system of Islander consensual role delineation, which needs to come before dynamic action, is threatened. Not only Westerners but Islanders who have grown somewhat westernized in their thinking are likely to have stepped in before the indigenous system has been properly activated.

One of the most serious aspects of this whole scenario is that Islander organization is being bypassed and therefore failing to be exercised on so many occasions that the very social patterns are in danger. They are not called forth often enough to organize basic community needs. We need to think carefully about some of the implications of the article in this volume by Mr Jerry Anau of Boigu Island. It seems to me that we cannot avoid the implications of Mr Anau's article. The manner in which Western intervention has taken place has greatly weakened the principle of cooperation in the community. More sensitive forms of cultural intervention by Westerners may well have had a very different result.

NOTES

1. I am much indebted to Dr Marvin Mayers author of *Christianity Confronts Culture* for his workshop sessions (Papua New Guinea, 1981) on societies with a prime focus on person as goal compared to Western societies where the emphasis so much of the time is primarily on object as goal.

Author's note for 1989 edition: As I look over this article three years after it was first published, I ask myself what has taken place in bilingual education in schools and in the community. There has been no frontal assult on bilingual education but there has been useful progress through low-key efforts. Ms Anne Watkins as a pre-school advisory teacher has fostered the use of vernacular language in pre-literacy materials. Students have been enthusiastic, and it must be helpful for their understanding of the reading process. Thursday Island High School has instituted a full-time permanent position for an Islander person with linguistic training to teach traditional Western Torres Strait language and to cooperate with other teachers in making all subjects more culturally relevant. There has also been a general increase in the cross-cultural preparedness of teachers coming into the schools, and there have been numerous examples of schools making some use of the vernacular in written form. For example, Saibai Island school has sent home newsletters that contain vernacular articles. TSIMA via the local radio has greatly fostered interest in the local vernaculars. There has been a low key but significant resurgence of interest throughout the Torres Strait in the use of vernacular in written form.

Bessie Aragu and Judy Kennedy worked as a team to teach literacy and create a cookbook.

SITTING ON THE MAT OF AN EVENING - HELPING OUR CHILDREN

Fr John Peter of Boigu Island
Recorded and translated by Rod Kennedy

(In the following, Fr Peter speaks to his own people of the importance of the time spent each evening with the family, and the family responsibility for passing on the traditional culture.)

This is a thing that we should do as we sit in the evening on the mats. We (all the family) sit in the one place on the mats drawing our children and grandchildren to us for the evening chat where you might tell them a story.

This is how it could go. The story starts like this. The mangrove seed (shaped like a spear) hung from the tree. The crab lived down below. When the mangrove seed fell it struck the crab on the back. The crab cried out to the fire, "Help me, help me, there is a great tooth biting my back." That is the kind of story the children will like.[1]

Some evenings you should read stories from books. You will find the youngsters very keen if you read them new stories then explain them. If you do this you will find that they come to understand about reading. When they come to start school, their mouths and tongues will be facile, they will make good progress.

NOTES

1. Fr Peter here gives a fragment of a well known Torres Strait folktale. SAL students wrote this up as a children's story.

Vernacular text:

KUTAW NIYAY WAKUNU - NGALPAN MOEGINA KAZIPA

Ina nabi za ngalpa ayimpa, a ina nabi niyay matha kutaw niyay midh nanga. Ngi urapun doegamoenu nipa ngitha, a garwoeydhamoeyn nginu kazil a ngepal kutaw yoepa, matha kedha ngidh adhi uman nginu kazipa a ngepoepa.

Kedha ngoedhalnga sike, na adhiw kuyk kedha, biw gimal puzipu, githalay apal niparuy. Kedha nanga biw pariz nanga, githalay lu danaman kaliya mathaman. Na kedha Githalay, "Igere, igere, muy ay, muy ay, ina gar gobaniya dhang paparal." Kedha ngoedhal gidha nanga nginu kazipa ngepoepa balbayginga.

Wara kubilu nanga ngidh thusi geth tidiz thanamulpa kazipa ngepoepa kurusipoegaypa. Thanamulpa matha ngoedhagidh kedha ngidh thanamulpa geth tidamoeyn kayn gidhal, kalanu sakar pudhamoeyn sethabi gidhal. Ngidh nanga kedha zageth aymparuy nanga, thanamulpa kazipa ngepoepa koey ubilnga kurusipoegaypa, a wara kedha thanamulpa mura thusiw gethatiday ngulayg gasampu. Wa kalanu thana ngurpaypa ladhun, thanamun gudal a neythay woer asimoeyn getha tidaypa thusipa, kalanu thana mina matha ngoedhagidh ngurpay zagethoepa.

WIFE-LENDING: CONFLICTING VALUES

Rod Kennedy

[Editor's note: The following brief article is included in this volume because it illustrates the strong reactions that can occur when there is confrontation with differing cultural values. Westerners who seek more than surface interaction with Torres Strait people must be prepared not only to learn new rules of etiquette, but also to think through conflicting, deeply held values. *Ipi pawdh* is no longer practised, but the values expressed by this custom are still important to Islander integrity.]

When I first heard of the old Torres Strait practice of *ipi pawdh* I got quite a shock. Wishing to sue for peace, a warrior would lend a wife to warriors of the other side. This would defuse tension (for the men at any rate). It also pointed to future intermarriage likely to take place between clans not warring with each other. I was particularly surprised to hear that this custom was employed when the men of Dauan took South Sea Island mission teachers to Boigu Island to begin evangelism there.

Ipi means "wife", while *pawdh* means "peace" with the extended meaning of non-aggression even where one of the parties is fighting against some other group. For instance, in the biblical account of the Israelites destroying Jericho, they maintained a *pawdh* with the household of Rahab. They spared her household because she had helped them. Likewise God's angel maintained *pawdh* with the Israelites who had marked their doorposts and lintels with blood. Egyptians who had not done this were destroyed.

The *pawdh* bit seems fine, but what about the lending of a wife? I think that the first important point to consider is that this was no everyday action. It was a significant ceremonial sacrifice clearly perceived as being in marked contrast to everyday practice. Though the taboos on pre-marital sex were not very strict, Islanders were and are more strict about marital fidelity than are white Australians. Also the anthropologists who wrote in those early days observed real care and affection between men and their wives. *Ipi pawdh* stands out as something very different from the day to day behaviour code and was doubtless reserved for times of extremity. The small group of Dauan men involved must have seen this missionary journey as dangerous and important.

The white missionaries with their big sailing boat who had accompanied the South Sea teachers as far as Dauan had a degree of immunity against attack. By 1871 the Islanders of the whole Strait had in large measure capitulated to Western technology and were much less likely to declare war on the whites than they might have fifty years earlier. The Torres Strait Islanders and Pacific Islanders entering Boigu had no such advantage. The Boigu warriors charged out from the bush and quickly hacked the outriggers from the canoe saying, *"Ngitha koey zageth koezi maypa. Ngoey kay ngithamulpa woerimpa,"* "You cannot sail away now, we have you at our mercy."

Kay, the younger wife of one of the Dauan men, was then handed over to the Boigu men for the rest of the day. It must have been an awful experience for the poor woman. I'm sure that during that long preceding canoe journey she well knew that she was not accompanying the party to attend a sewing bee with the Boigu ladies. On the other hand, it is foolish of me as a twentieth century Christian to judge the actions of this group of people, the Dauan Islanders who had only recently come in contact with the missionaries.

If we are to appreciate what was done and why, we have to look at this action from the perspective of the Dauan Island people of that time. Participation in the missionary journey was a brave and generous act. The employment of the *ipi pawdh* custom was a mark of the danger they saw and the importance that they gave to the journey. A man who was normally very particular about protecting his wife as an extension of his own honour, sacrificed this right in order to save others from fighting and death. Actually the forsaking of fighting is remembered in this part of the Torres Strait as the essential message of the gospel as first brought to each of these islands. Mr Mebai Warusam of Saibai explained to me the traditional logic attached to the giving of a wife in suing for peace:

(i) A lady was the symbol of coolness. She cooled the heat and anger of men's passion that had been raised to fighting pitch.

(ii) A lady was the symbol of fruitfulness, peace, and nurture as she bore children and cared for them, as she tended young plants in the gardens men had cleared. Because peace would be followed by intermarriage between the groups that had ceased warring, the custom of *ipi pawdh* looked forward to this future exchange of young women in marriage. The "Boigu Book" written by the people of Boigu Island includes one very interesting story of a later return visit when three young Boigu girls were brought to Saibai to marry Saibai men. Two decided that they would return to Boigu. The third stayed on as a wife and learned the new way of life the South Sea Islander missionaries were teaching.

(iii) The *ipi pawdh* and intermarriage following led to a sharing of blood, as Mebai put it. Because people had blood relationships in common, this helped deter future fighting.

While I can see the logic of *ipi pawdh* in the traditional culture of the Torres Strait, at another level everything in me cries out against what happened. There is drastic conflict with many of the values that I have been taught since my childhood. Christian thought and modern humanist thought are both strongly opposed to such violations of the sanctity of the individual. Likewise there is a strong clash with values associated with a modern concept of women's rights.

We Westerners do well to remember that such values, so dear to us, cause us to act in ways that are highly offensive to people of other cultures. Many of the things done today in the name of individual freedom seriously offend the Islander sense of acting for the good of the extended family. One instance would be our propensity to shut our elders away in nursing homes rather than keep them in the extended family home. Yet surely our decisions concerning relationships with older relatives must be made in the light of our own culture. If Westerners will not have their lifestyle dictated by others, we must respect the need of others for their distinctive culture and value sets.

Children are a focus of love and attention in Islander culture.

The Kennedy children shared in the Islander love for children.

Processions and music are an important part of church life.

Blessing of the fleet, an annual event in the Anglican Church calendar.

ADOPTION AND MARRIAGE IN THE WESTERN TORRES STRAIT

Rod and Judy Kennedy

Importance of Adoption

Traditionally, adoption in the Torres Strait has fitted into the framework of exchange between families that is typified by a system of exchanging of presents at the time of marriage. These include valuable presents somewhat related to the bride-price system from Papua New Guinea. No system of bride-price is openly acknowledged in the Torres Strait today but the giving of presents is still important. The husband must give his future father-in-law a gift called the *muy rug* meaning the inner or hidden goods. The husband is often considered to be permanently indebted to his in-laws for having received a wife and more especially so if his wife is fruitful.

One way the husband may be asked by in-laws in the Torres Strait to reciprocate for the gift of a wife is to give children for adoption by someone in the extended in-law family. A child is usually given to a couple with few children, and especially a male child given to a couple without a male heir.

Rivers, writing in the reports of the Cambridge Expedition early this century (Haddon, ed., vol 5, p.126), spoke of adoption on the western island of Mabuiag: "It did not seem, however, as if adoption was very common in Mabuiag. It is generally agreed that when adoption took place the process was very complete, and that a man might never know that his adopted father was not his real father." However, Rivers noted that adoption was extremely common on Murray Island in the Eastern Torres Strait (Haddon, ed., vol. 6, p.65). Again he noted that extreme secrecy was kept, yet, "the fact of true descent is always remembered by the elders of the families concerned, even if forgotten by the community at large." Rivers was aware that he might not have been told of all the adoptions that did take place on Mabuiag. If we remember that on Murray Island the old men were only prepared to give kinship data to Rivers in private, but on Mabuiag the data was given in front of family groups, it becomes extremely probable that the Mabuiag people "forgot" to tell about a great many adoptions. We know that today there is a strong reticence to divulge this information to newcomers.

If the practice of adoption was not common in the time of the Cambridge Expedition, then it became common soon after. On Saibai Island today some 25% of people even in the over-45 age group are adoptees.

With respect to secrecy concerning adoption, Islander friends have said, "That's good, really good if it's a secret from the child." With the breakdown of traditional mores in the cross-cultural situation, the real mother will very often come and quietly tell the child of his status while he is still quite young.

Legal Adoption as Reinforcement for Traditional Values

People today look to legal adoption or custody orders to offset the tendency towards breakdown of traditional social mores. One lady aged about 55 years said to Judy that she was disappointed that with the child she had adopted traditionally she had not yet obtained a legal adoption. Later the natural parents had decided to reverse the arrangement. She said that there was a general understanding that if legal adoption had gone through, the arrangement could not have been reversed. Others have expressed the same view. (See Beckett n.d.a. for futher observations on adoption and rights of inheritance.)

We believe that the Islanders see the function of legal adoption as providing social sanctions that were present in their traditional system but have been weakened in the cross-cultural situation. One Islander said that without legal adoption people consider that the child might not grow up well. The implication was that the child would just drift and not have the kind of discipline that normally goes with belonging to a household. It is also an important tenet in the Torres Strait that all rites should be correctly performed. This is probably an additional strong motive for desiring legal adoption. These two cultural values are closely entwined: the functional idea that legality ensures some kind of stability to the child's upbringing, and the idea that if the papers are right then things are more likely to go right for the family.

In the Torres Strait, it is common for the nurture of a child to be shared among different nuclear families. According to the kinship terminology, the child calls his father's brothers "father". He also calls his mother's sisters "mother" and this terminology is reflected in a shared responsibility for nurture and discipline. If a child's parents die, then it is likely these relative will adopt that child.

If children or young single adults have behaved in a way that causes shame or a sharp family clash, they often move to the house of other close relatives for a number of days or even weeks, to avoid direct inter-personal confrontation with higher status people within the family. Often if an adopted girl later becomes an unmarried mother-to-be, she will shift house, quite likely to the home of her natural parents or perhaps some other relative. The Islanders would not consider this temporary moving house for special reasons to be drifting, so long as the child's home life still has a definite focus. It is accepted that the nurture of the child will often be shared between the persons who give the child in adoption and the persons who adopt the child.

Preferences and Obligations in Adoption

In deciding who is to adopt the baby, parents will give preference to a close male relative, such as the girl's brother, mother's brother's son, father, or father's brother's son. (These men, except her father, would all be classed as her brothers). People like to keep the child in a part of the clan that bears the same family name. If no male relative asks, then a sister or aunty or cousin who has asked will be given the baby. So a female relative asking first will not always be given the baby. Sometimes no one asks for the baby before it is born, but the relative is waiting to see if the baby is a boy or girl. If the baby is of the sex they want, then they will ask. The girl's parents cannot ask anyone to adopt.

The custom of asking for a baby also applies to legitimate children. One may ask a married woman while she is pregnant if they can adopt the child. The mother has the right to say "yes" or "no", but social pressure for her to agree can be considerable. One older man told us he was obliged to give his third son to his wife's brother, as they had only one girl. Since he had received a wife from that family and it was now plain that the family "needed" more children, he had a moral obligation to reciprocate.

Birth and Care of the Adopted Child

The practice of adoption is a basic part of life in the Torres Strait. Adoption of legitimate babies was very frequent up to the 1950s and 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s very few marriages took place and most adoptions were of illegitimate babies. Today, marriages are on the increase, but most adoptions are still of illegitimate children.

When a single girl realises she is pregnant she dare not tell her mother or father directly, so she tells her sister or favourite young aunty, who then tells the parents. Sometimes the parents react angrily towards their daughter but other parents regard the coming baby as a gift from God. On the Island of Saibai, if the girl becomes pregnant from a resident Saibai man, there will be a courtcase. If the man involved holds a local government position, he is likely to lose it.

While the court proceedings are pending, the girl will often live in a home other than her own, to avoid confrontation with parents. Perhaps if she herself was adopted out and then later returned to her real mother, she now returns to her adoptive parents' home, spending her pregnancy there. In another case a girl left her adoptive father's home and went to stay with the family who had adopted her previous illegitimate child. Her father came periodically and paid money for the girl's keep. She also did a lot of tasks around the house. The reason could be that the man involved was a married man living next door (the adoptive mother's brother). However, the girl often stays on at home, particularly if the father of the baby is an outsider.

At seven months of pregnancy all pregnant women in the Torres Strait go into Thursday Island to await delivery. A cottage is provided close to the hospital by the Department of Community Services for both single and married women. A relative, usually mother or sister, will go in with the girl and see her settled. The relatives will return to the home island and very close to the due date again go in to be with the girl. Sometimes the girl will stay with a close relative on Thursday Island.

In the case of an unmarried mother-to-be, the baby has usually been promised to an adoptive relative before she leaves the home island for her confinement. This relative has seen that the girl is pregnant and has asked the parents for the child. The girl has little say concerning the adoption. Unhappiness was caused in one family by a daughter who while living on the mainland became pregnant and promised the baby to someone there who had asked her for it. The girl came home from hospital with her baby. Her parents wanted another sister to adopt the baby, but the girl went her own way. When the baby was weaned at about 4 months old, she took him back to the mainland.

The baby is sometimes collected from the hospital by the adopting parents but usually it is cared for by the natural mother till 3 to 6 months. The girl breast feeds the baby during this time. This is her sole responsibility. This may mean, for example, that a girl who normally lives on Thursday Island must come to Saibai and stay with the adoptive family. This takes place even when the nominal adoptive parent is a young man working away from Saibai. The baby is effectively handed over to the young man's mother or other relative. After the child is weaned the girl departs.

In other cases where the natural mother is a Saibai resident, I've noted that the child is 18 to 24 months old before the mother leaves. With children adopted by someone of the same household (such as a young man who is not a competitor for the mothering role), the natural mother continues to nurture her own child indefinitely. Where the adoptive parent is a male of another household, it is more likely that the man's mother or sister will take responsibility and nurture the child until the young man is married.

Of the 16 or so births on Saibai between 1977 and 1979 only one was legitimate. Bearing all the above in mind one can understand the confusion and embarrassment of a child when asked who his father is. Even if a young male has adopted him, his world is full of mothers, aunties, grandmother and grandfather. It is much less threatening to ask, "Who is your mother?".

The child never lacks for love but the discipline is often haphazard. His adoptive father functions more as we expect of an uncle; the child may not even see him very often. While the child's real father may have little to do with him directly, it appears that an important bond remains.

The Decline of Marriage

It is important to look at possible reasons that different observers have put forward for the dearth of marriages. Most Islanders are dissatisfied that marriages are not taking place, and an older man has specifically said to Rod that things went well with him because he married young. Barbara Thompson (see Moore 1979) was a castaway with the people of the Western Torres Strait. She reported that the girls married quite young, at about sixteen years of age, and the young men only a couple of years older. In the Cambridge Report early this century, it is noted that people were dissatisfied about a tendency towards later marriage ages. The researcher in that case believed that some of the parents were holding out for higher bride-prices from men from places like the Philippines and the Pacific Islands who came to the region in connection with the marine industries, pearling or fishing. He also noted that girls who reached such an age as twenty-two years without being married were often teased. People said they were too old for marriage and taunts were made that their bosoms had sagged. Where English speakers say that a girl has been "left on the shelf", the Western Torres Strait expression is *Na kulisiya pawpa thayan*, meaning that she has been swept away by the downwind current.

Dr. Jeremy Beckett has made a number of references in his writings to community factors affecting marriage. In his earlier fieldwork in the 1960s Beckett noted that most young people were not getting married until almost in their thirties, but they were getting married by then, even thought sexual contact was not effectively denied to unmarried people (Beckett n.d.b.). In his 1987 publication, Beckett speaks of the impact of economic independence on marriage. Supporting parent's benefits, available since 1975 to mothers without husbands, can make marriage economically unncessary for women living on the islands: "Not only is the benefit substantial by Torres Strait standards, it may be more reliable than the notional support of a husband who is away on the mainland, working irregularly or drinking heavily" (Beckett 1987:220). Young men also enjoy greater economic independence. Away from island society and the traditional obligations to parents and family, they "tend to spend as they go" and neither the young men nor their parents have strong incentives to save the money required for a costly wedding feast and presents to the bride's family (Beckett 1987:220-1).

By 1980 delays in marriage had gone even further and a lot of the older women and men around forty were still unmarried. Since 1980, on Saibai at least, there has been a gradual reversal of the trend towards parental opposition to marriage. Many young people strongly desire to be married.

Parental Desire to Retain Own Family

The reasons that have been put forward by Islanders for parental opposition to marriage include unwillingness of parents to relinquish their children. People living on the Reserve Islands or in closeknit Islander communities elsewhere still are not allowed to marry without the consent of parents and the mother's brother. This applies to both prospective bride and groom. Parents today are tending to cling to their children. We don't think they are holding out for higher gifts as was suggested in the Cambridge Report. We believe that it's more a case of desiring to be cared for in old age. This has always been an important part of the culture. The parents do not wish their children to marry people with no job prospects or who don't seem "steady" as they put it, and the culture clash has produced a situation where quite a number of the young men on the Reserve Islands get drunk with reasonable frequency and the parents of prospective brides do not want such men to marry their daughters. Likewise if girls are more interested in new clothes and less interested in traditional work pursuits, the parents of the potential bridegroom may refuse consent to a marriage. This demonstrates a clash between traditional community values and values that have come in from contact with Western culture. If on the other hand the young man does have job prospects, the risk is that he will be transferred away from the home island and the daughter will not be on hand to take care of her own parents in old age.

Local Employment Prospects

There is a real lack of local enterprise to retain young men on the islands. Marine industry continues but some of it is not very profitable. Often Papuans who do not have the alternative of receiving Social Security payments take these jobs and tend to receive very low wages. The Islanders are unwilling to be away from their own communities under difficult living conditions for such low wages. On the other hand they frequently spend a year or more working in the culture pearl industry at such places as Kuri Bay in Western Australia.

Quite a number of the young men are keen to have jobs which they could maintain and still continue to participate in their local culture. This is difficult to achieve but by and large they don't want to go off and live on pearling luggers and so on, unless the financial incentives are high. Lack of housing is claimed by many Islanders to be a barrier to marriage. Up until about 30 years ago most of the Islanders built houses for themselves. At that time the main building materials were mangrove timber for frames (these proved durable and were skillfully adzed by the Islanders). The cladding material was generally just corrugated iron, and today there is a general dissatisfaction on the part of Islanders with such buildings as main houses. On the other hand, numbers of these buildings are still being erected as kitchens, or out-houses.

Government Provided Housing

There have been extensive endeavours made by both Commonwealth and State governments to offer the people houses of the Western style including more glass windows, lining against the heat and other advantages. Governments have recognized the desire of Islanders to have more modern homes. Islanders certainly take pride in keeping these new homes neat and tidy but tend to feel that all structural maintenance is government responsibility. Also the responsibility for co-ordinating the work of building a house has passed from traditional extended family leaders to government, with the government employing local Islanders as tradesmen and labourers (usually semi-skilled tradesmen in the Western sense). Consequently the employer has been at least 100 miles away from the employees in most instances and as a result, the cost of erecting a kit home in some parts of the Torres Strait has risen considerably (about $70,000 in 1982). The way in which government help has been given has enabled Islanders to occupy houses similar to those of white Australians, but control of the supply of local housing is now in the hands of the government, including local councils. The extended family units, which have also been the traditional close-knit economic units, feel relatively powerless to control their own economic welfare. In this connection we should look at Mr. Jerry Anau's statement (in this volume) where he outlines his views on the social dynamics of mutual assistance in the pre-cash economy. The people on Boigu Island, where accommodation has in the past been very short, claim that this was a strong discouragement to marriages. Parents would not allow their young people to live in the family home immediately after marriage because there was likely to be a noisy time as they got their marriage sorted out.

Marriage and Culture Change

In summary, possible reasons for a very sharp fall-off in the marriage rate in the Torres Strait Islands include: (i) culture clash causing parental dissatisfaction with prospective spouses; (ii) conflict between the parental desire to keep their family around them to look after them in old age, and the likelihood that western-type employment will take the new family away from the ageing parents needing care; and (iii) a lack of job prospects that are attractive to the Islanders and a lack of housing.

Traditional and religious values that have been inculcated by the London Missionary Society and later by the Church of England are such that it is not possible on some islands for young people who are unable to get marriage partners to live openly in any sort of defacto relationship. Any relationship between the sexes has to be very clandestine. (This is mainly true of some Reserve Islands.)

From our observations it would be grossly unfair to claim that young Islanders are deliberately preferring unmarried parenthood because of the extra Social Security benefits that can be collected in this way. Yet it would be fair to say that the married parents on average, unless they have unusually well paid jobs, are in a much more difficult position financially than other households of several generations that include young children. The young married couples are under strong social pressure to spend beyond their means. Such problems can only be viewed as a complex interaction of two cultures. Along with the loss of self-sufficiency in housing, there has been a loss in the relative incentive to subsistence gardening and this has worsened nutrition, which is very important to the wellbeing of children.

Interaction between broader Australian values and traditional Torres Strait values has already had a profound effect on the workings of the local culture. There is a great need for government intervention to be sensitive to the local culture and how it presently solves various social problems. Government cannot escape decisions which may have profound social consequences, but weight must always be given to maintaining local self reliance. Just one problem is the difficulty of pleasing people of different generations. Older Islanders will lay more emphasis on the rights of the extended family. Younger people will emphasize more the rights of individuals, though even the younger generation is much more group minded than is the average white person. Islanders do feel very nervous about having any change suddenly thrust upon them, and patience in talking over proposed changes with the local people is a necessary pre-requisite.

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FEASTS: CELEBRATION OR OBLIGATION?[1]

Judy Kennedy

0. Introduction

Feasts are a time of great celebration in the Kala Lagaw society of Saibai Island, but these feasts also involve the fulfilling of extensive obligations that are producing stress in significant areas of the culture. Feasts are quite common on Saibai. In fact, it is rare for more than three or four weeks to pass without a feast. Because of this frequency of occurrence it is important to understand the function of the feast in order to better understand the culture. The purpose of this paper is to discuss both the beneficial and stress-producing effects of feasts.

The Torres Strait Islands, of which Saibai Island is a part, have been written about quite extensively through the years. The earliest extensive records are from the 1840's. One is a report by Brierly about Barbara Thompson who was cast away for several years on the island of Muralag (Moore 1979). At the turn of the century Rivers, in the *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits* (Haddon and Rivers, 1904 and 1908), wrote an extensive ethnographic account of the culture. Beckett (1978), whose main research was done from 1958 to 1961, has written numerous articles on politics, marriage, and adoption in the Torres Strait. Other research has been done by Helen Duncan (1974) in the area of economics.

Section one of this paper introduces two kinds of feasts and various features of these feasts. The positive value of feasts is focused on in section two. Section three examines the obligations to church and family that are fulfilled through feasts and the enforcement of these obligations. Section four briefly discusses the stress that is being produced by fulfilling these obligations. The final section summarizes and draws conclusions concerning feasts.

1.0 Kinds of Feasts

On Saibai Island there are basically two kinds of feasts, distinguishable by whether or not invitations are required. Open feasts do not require special invitations; participation of the whole community is expected. Closed feasts are only for those who are invited, usually the extended family. Both open and closed feasts, however, have many elements in common.

1.1 Common Elements

The most common elements of feasts are food, decorations, participation of the church, and dancing. These elements are not necessarily present at each feast and the form in which they appear may vary, but the greater the importance of the feast, the more they will be evidenced.

Foods for feasts are generally a combination of western and traditional. Western foods include rice, tinned vegetables, tinned fruits, cakes, biscuits, lollies, jelly, custard, and tinned cream. Traditional foods include dishes of yam or sweet potato and cassava in coconut. The meat (turtle, dugong, fish, or deer) is normally caught by the men. If no game is caught, then frozen chicken or beef is purchased from the store, or the feast is postponed.

Like food, decorations are a combination of western and traditional. Western decorations may include raffia streamers, crepe paper streamers, balloons, and ribbons. Traditional decorations are local greenery such as ferns, coconut branches, green branches from mangrove trees, coloured seaweed, and banana plants. For most feasts these decorations are concentrated in a temporary booth set up for people to eat in.

Church participation in one form or another is present at most feasts. This participation may simply be the priest saying grace before the eating begins, or a church service or mass held earlier in the day. Some feasts centre around an event of the church calendar. Other feasts centre on the active participation of the priest when he is blessing a person or a new acquisition.

Dancing usually comes after the conclusion of the eating, though it may be more central. The style of dancing may be either traditional or introduced. For any important feast the traditional singing and dancing is practised for weeks beforehand.

1.2 Open Feasts

Most of the open feasts occur on a yearly cycle since they are celebrating events in the Church calendar. Other open feasts celebrate special events or are used for fund raising. They are for the entire community and do not require a special invitation.

The feasts celebrating events of the church calendar are spread throughout the year. These feasts vary greatly in the amount of community participation. Following a major feast, such as Christmas, there tends to be a clustering of smaller, more informal feasts. This clustering is a natural outcome of the fact that the families are already together for the major feast and the decorations are already present.

Special events that are commemorated with feasts include such things as the Archbishop's visit, the arrival of an important government official, or the unveiling of a monument commemorating an event in the community's history. Most of the community will participate in these feasts.

Fund-raising feasts are a distinct variation of open feasts. The whole community can come, but participation is limited to those who are willing to pay. These feasts are normally sponsored by a particular group such as the school, Mother's Union, or Sunday School in order to have funds for projects. Fund raising dinners are common; often locally caught game is used. Another common fund raiser is the Bring and Buy, but this has an additional distinctive feature in that the food is not necessarily eaten at that time, and other fund-raising activities will be going on at the same time.

Figure 1 shows the various open feasts as they occur throughout the year. The estimated amount of community participation in each feast is indicated on a scale of 0 (least) to 100% (most). The most important feasts have a participation level aproaching 100%.

1.3 Closed Feasts

Closed feasts centre around rites of passage and the blessing of new acquisitions of members of the family. They are only for those who receive an invitation. It may be sent by word of mouth if it goes only to the close family or may be hand-written or duplicated if sent to the entire village. The number of feasts that a family holds and the number of people invited is directly proportional to the family's wealth and prestige.

On Saibai Island there are many feasts centring around rites of passage. They include such things as infant baptism, baby's first birthday, child's first haircut, ordinary birthdays, first shave, 21st birthday, engagement, wedding, funeral, arrival of a tombstone, and tombstone opening (see section 1.4). There are also closed feasts for the blessing of the new house, dinghy, or outboard motor.

Distinguishing features of closed feasts include gifts and the kind of food eaten. Gifts, which are not present in open feasts, are given to the honoured person, the priest, or the church. The gifts range most frequently from $5.00 to $25.00. The food at closed feasts may vary from a simple afternoon tea to a full evening meal. If it is a full meal, then the meat may be pig, which is normally eaten only at closed feasts. When a pig is donated to an open feast, then it raises the prestige of the donor.

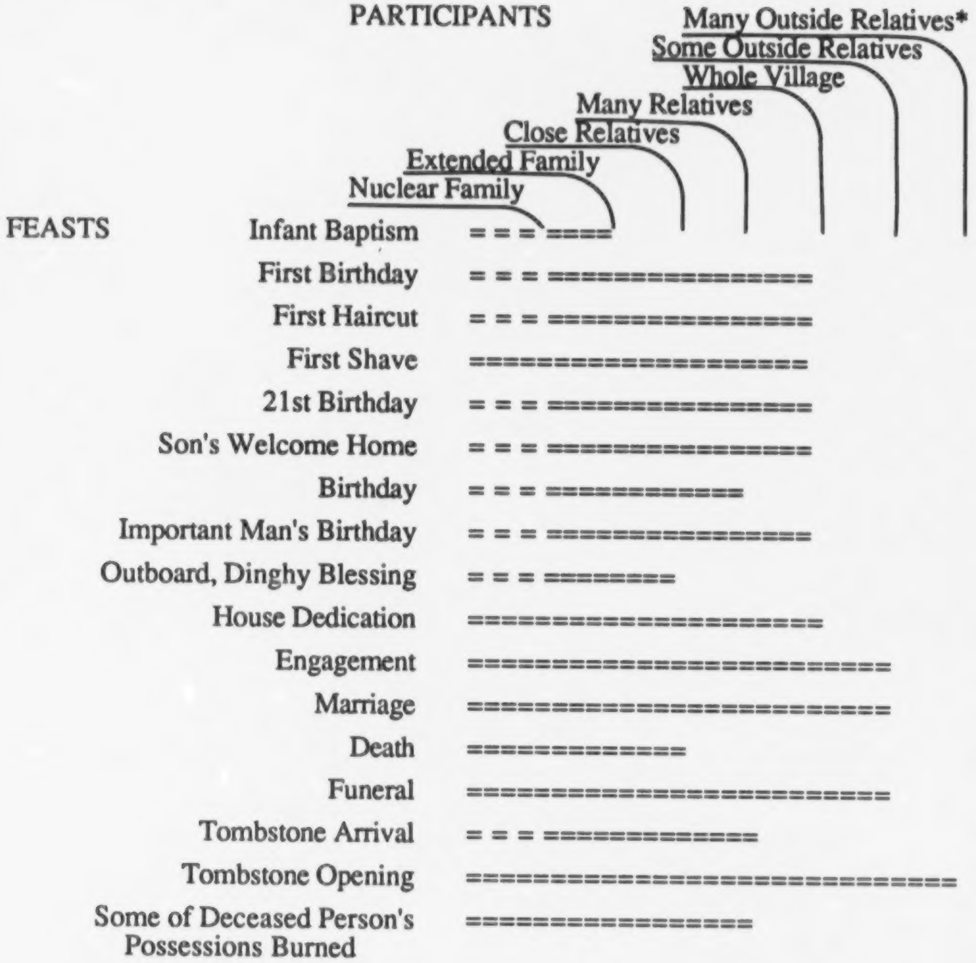
Figure 2 shows the minimal and maximal levels of involvement in each closed feast. Figure 3 summarizes several features that distinguish closed feasts from open feasts.

Figure 1. Degree of Participation in Open Feasts

(approximate % of community)

		Degree of Participation 0% 100%
CYCLIC		
January:	New Year	====================
	Removal of Decorations	=====
March:	Mothering Sunday	==========
April:	Easter	====================
	Removal of Decorations	===============
	Anzac Day	===============
May:	Ascension Sunday	====================
June:	Holy Trinity Sunday	====================
	Removal of Decorations	====================
July:	Coming of the Light	====================
August:	Church Bazaar	====================
October:	St. Michael's/All Angels	==========
November:	Mother's Union Break-Up	===============
December:	Church Anniversary	====================
	School Break-Up	====================
	Christmas	====================
	Boxing Day	====================
NON-CYCLIC		
	Bishop's Visit	====================
	Important Gov't. Visitors	==========
	Turtle Supper	===============
	Bring and Buy	==========
	Disco	===============
	Unveiling of Monument	====================

Figure 2. Participants at Closed Feasts



==== Maximal Participation
= = = Minimal Participation
* "Outside Relatives" are those living in other communities.

Figure 3. Distinguishing Features of Feasts

	Open	Closed
Food	+	+
Dancing	+	+
Decorations	+	+
Church participation	+	+
Possible fund-raising	+	–
Yearly cycle occurrence	+	–
Coordinated with Church calendar	+	–
Open to entire community	+	–
Rites of passage observed	–	+
Blessing of purchases	–	+
Invitation required	–	+
Eating of pigs	–	+
Gifts	–	+

1.4 A Tombstone Opening

The tombstone opening is an event peculiar to the Torres Strait, seemingly originating from the burial customs of the last century. Before missionary contact the body of a dead person was placed on a *sik*, a special platform above ground. Here the body would lie for some months until the head fell from it. If the skin had dried hard and leathery, then people would be confident that things were going well with the person's spirit. But if there were more obvious signs of putrefaction, people would be fearful that the spirit would be troublesome. After the skull fell from the body it would be polished, coloured with various pigments, and used as a central item in divination and sorcery. Barbara Thompson, a castaway for several years in the Torres Strait, reports that while a skull was being cleaned, she was rebuked for screwing up her nose at the smell. She was told that she was insulting the spirit (Moore 1979). Apart from taking the skull, a few other bones would be taken and placed in bundles which were worn around the neck of relatives. These bundles were closely associated with hunting magic as well as protection from supernatural harm.

When the head fell from the body, the platform and the body were then to be buried together. A feast was held at this time. According to Barbara Thompson (Moore 1979), this feast, and the making of the charms with the various bones, marked the end of mourning for the deceased. Thompson speaks of a wife of a man from another island wanting to return to her home so that she could get some of her father's bones and end her mourning for him.

Sinnika Turpeinen and Lillian Fleischmann (n.d.) write of the Bine people of southern Papua New Guinea who live geographically close to the Torres Strait people and who have a similar custom. A widow must take particular precautions until her mourning is ended. At that time her husband's spirit is said to go to its resting place, and she is then released from many taboos and becomes free to remarry.

The Pacific Island mission teachers of the London Missionary Society directed their converts to bury the deceased in deep graves, and today this practice is universal in the Torres Strait. The bodies are not normally allowed to remain above ground on the home island for more than one night. Tremendous effort and expense is made to ensure that the body is brought back to the home island if a death occurs elsewhere, and all will be in readiness to hold the funeral when the body finally arrives. A feast is held after the funeral.

The family then saves until they have money to buy a personalized tombstone. Large concrete surrounds are built for the grave. These are covered with tiles and the total cost comes to several hundred dollars. When a tombstone is brought in by boat, the family may celebrate with a small feast. They then continue to save to be able to produce a very lavish feast at the time of the tombstone's unveiling. The men of the family work to finish preparing the grave site, the concrete surround is built, the headstone is set in place, and all the tiling is completed. All this time the headstone is kept wrapped in material and will remain so for some months after the gravesite has been completed and until the unveiling takes place.

Staging a tombstone opening or unveiling involves the family in a great deal of expense, as they must cater for the whole community and many visitors. Costs are incurred for elaborate decorations, large amounts of food, and the charter of planes or boats to bring relatives from other communities--causing the total cost to rise to tens of thousands of dollars.

At the formal ceremony a priest of the church, usually an Islander, officiates. People make a procession to the highly decorated grave where the priest recites the virtues of the person who has died. He says prayers and sprinkles holy water, and then a ceremonial ribbon is cut. Protocol is very strict, and each act must be performed by a person in the correct relationship with the deceased. The feast which follows is larger and more elaborate than any other. Great efforts are made to bring in foods not normally seen in the outer islands, including fresh salad vegetables and freezer foods such as ice cream.

2.0 Positive Values

Feasts are central in the lives of the Saibai Islanders. These feasts, which involve large amounts of money, time and effort, provide the people with a sense of fulfillment in many areas of their lives. Some of the positive values of the feasts are now examined as they relate to family involvement, use of free time, competition for social acceptance, and the need for celebration.

2.1 Family Involvement

Feasts bring families back together and strengthen family relations by the comforting of the bereaved and by allowing the family to work together in planning and preparing for a big event. Family members, even those living and working far away, are expected to come to important feasts such as a funeral or a tombstone opening. This is true even when they have to pay air fares of $500.00 or more.

Family relationships are strengthened at the time of a funeral feast. Relatives come and stay with the immediate family of the deceased until the funeral. After the funeral some relatives may stay as long as a month, especially if a young person has died. During this time the relatives will comfort the immediate family and show that they are united with the family in their mourning.

In earlier times families worked together in gardens and in providing for other daily needs. Due to various social factors discussed below, it is no longer necessary to spend extended periods of time together in the garden. Feasts fill this need for family involvement by providing activities which allow them to work and plan together towards a common goal. Many young girls working in Cairns become homesick due to missing the involvement of planning and working together for a feast.

2.2 Free Time

Saibai Islanders now have much more free time than previously, due to social security benefits and the presence of a store. The planning and preparation of feasts provides them with a meaningful way of using new-found free time and money.

As citizens of Australia the people qualify for Commonwealth social services such as the old age pension, child endowment, unemployment benefits, unmarried mother's allowance, and widow's pension. In addition they also receive free medical benefits and free air or sea transport for high school students. All these benefits have led to an increased cash flow.

With money and the presence of a store, the Saibai Islanders are able to purchase food when needed. This too has led to less time spent in gardening and hunting, leaving them with more free time. The Islanders have chosen to use this extra money and time for feasts which benefit large groups of people and draw them together in unity.

2.3 Competition

In addition to uniting people, feasts encourage competition and allow the people as a group to maintain a standard they feel proud of in the presence of outsiders. Families endeavour to show their wealth and prestige by giving more and better feasts than another family. There is also competition for prestige between groups in open feasts for fund raising. This is especially true in the Annual Church Bazaar where members of clans will purchase any remaining items being sold by their own clan so that they can raise more money for the church then another clan and thus gain prestige.

When important visitors come to Saibai they are welcomed with a large feast prepared by the community. These feasts give the Islanders confidence that they have entertained well. Individual families are reticent to have visitors in their homes because they feel that they cannot provide sufficiently for the important visitors. As a group, however, they are able to prepare food that will honour their guests.

2.4 Celebration

Feasts provide a needed time of celebration in what might otherwise be a dull existence. They are times of embellishment and reminiscing. These celebrations embellish their lives with colourful decorations, opportunities for wearing new clothes, eating of delicacies, listening to good music, and participating in dancing. During feasts people relax and sit around talking about past events. A special interest at these times is the discussion of past feasts and the quality of food at those feasts.

Feasts are valuable. Through feasts, family relationships are strengthened, free time is used in a way that is meaningful to the group, individuals are able to demonstrate good citizenship and gain social acceptance by contributing to the community feasts, and an element of variety is brought into an otherwise routine existence. Without feasts there would be a sense of void in various aspects of the lives of the Saibai Islanders.

3.0 Obligations

In addition to being times of celebration and social involvement, feasts are means of fulfilling obligations to both the church and the family. The present pattern of feasts is being reinforced because of the sanctioning presence of the priest at the feasts and the fear of retribution if obligations are not fulfilled through feasts.

3.1 Church

Obligations to the church include finances, providing for the priest, and the appeasing of God. The people are expected to raise funds and contribute to such financial obligations as the church assessment, church rebuilding fund, church project (such as purchasing a generator), and to take care of Mother's Union fees and the sending of a delegate to the Mother's Union Conference. There are weekly offerings at the church, but these tend to be very small. So the money necessary for meeting obligations to the church is raised through open feasts that charge for the food eaten, through the Annual Church Bazaar at which food and other items are sold, and through gifts to the church which are donated at various closed feasts. The majority of financial obligations to the church are fulfilled through the Annual Church Bazaar at which about $5000.00 is usually raised. (This was typical of 1980 to 1982.)

The people's obligation to the priest is technically met through the paying of the church assessment, a set sum of several thousand dollars a year which goes towards parish running costs including the priest's stipend which is administered by the Diocese[2]. Even though it is not unusual for the church to be behind in payment of this assessment, they have nevertheless raised comparatively large sums of money for more tangible projects. The system of church assessment is a relatively abstract concept. Because of this the people tend to set aside their responsibility for the church assessment; on the other hand, a priest working in his home area will receive gifts of money at closed feasts. The people also feel some obligation to share game and garden produce with the priest at other times. This more personal pattern of giving relates more directly to their own view of reciprocity and fulfilling obligations.

To the extent that Islander church men continue to think in terms of traditional Melanesian religious values, it may be said that feasts also fulfill obligations to appease God. By helping to prepare food and by donating food and money for the feasts, the people are following standards of behaviour that are required of them. This correct standard of behaviour is a way in which they fulfill obligations to God. Another means of fulfilling obligations and appeasing God is by the feasts given at funerals. At these funeral feasts the relatives are persuading the spirits of dead people to be helpful. It is imperative that the people serve the spirit of the person who has died. If the spirits are pleased with the feast, they may go to God and act as mediators on behalf of the people in order to appease God.

3.2 Family

Obligations to family are fulfilled through reciprocal relations. Good things are done for others so that they will be obligated to reciprocate at another time. This fulfilling and building up of obligations with both the dead and living is frequently seen in feasts.

The most important obligations are to those who are dying or have just died. If these people are treated well, then their spirits will go to God and obtain benefits for the living. The spirit of a dead person who is not appeased may cause many difficulties (see section 3.3). An example of the type of social pressure which tends to magnify this trend is the manner in which specialists in supernatural communication will tell a dead person's relatives that the spirit is not satisfied with the treatment he or she has received. The relatives may be told, for instance, that the temporary shelter over a new grave is not good enough. As a consequence, every relative is expected to contribute to the funeral and tombstone opening.

Obligations with the living must also be fulfilled or built up. By contributing to a feast, relatives are reciprocating for help on a previous feast, showing gratitude for acting as a mediator on one's behalf, or fulfilling one's obligations as godparents of a child. Contributing to feasts is also a means of building up obligations toward the contributor. If a person has contributed to many feasts, then when it is time for his own feasts, many people will be obligated to help and the feast will be big. However, this strong sense of social obligation does not negate the great enjoyment that Islanders derive from working together for a worthy celebration.

3.3 Sanction and Retribution

The church is seen to sanction feasts by its presence and its need for money. The present pattern of feasts is likely to continue due to the sanctioning presence of the church, the fear of retribution by family and church, and the fulfilling of obligations through the feasts.

The church is present in all aspects of life from birth to death. See Beckett (1978) for an historical perspective on the development of overall church involvment in community affairs. At each major event the priest plays a significant role. Since his presence is necessary for all major life events, and major events are always connected with feasts, the priest or in his absence a deacon will be present at most major feasts. His presence and activity suggests his sanction and approval of all things that are involved with feasts. Thus, feasts must be good and worthwhile.

To understand the Church's dominance in feasts it is necessary to look at its emergence as a dynamic force in the community. Thompson reports that feasts were held in the 1800's, but they were eaten before dark and celebrated such things as victory in battle (Moore, 1979). The following extract from the Tongan anthropologist Sione Latukefu explains how the South Sea Island missionaries introduced a different conception of feasting to Melanesia. It became a dynamic alternative to war and the gaining of prestige through collecting the skulls of enemies. There was a radical change from eating in private to eating unafraid in public.

> Feasting was also used by the South Sea Island missionaries to bring together people who had been hostile or traditional enemies. Informants said that while the European missionaries only visited the village occasionally and in a rather formal manner, the South Sea Islanders would sit down with them, share betel nuts, and discuss their problems. Local people who happened to be in a South Sea Islands missionary's house at mealtime were invited to share the meal with the family. Gradually the South Sea Islands missionaries introduced the concept of feasts to mark important occasions and invited people to participate in them. When I visited Munda in the Solomons in 1968, a feast was held, and during one of the speeches, the speaker pointed to me and said that it was the Tongans who had introduced this type of feasting. He imitated the traditional way of eating: people hiding themselves and eating furtively, looking around nervously to see whether anyone was watching them and waiting to attack or procure food remains to prepare sorcery against them. After the Tongans had introduced the new way of feasting, everyone sat together, even those who had been traditional enemies, and enjoyed a well-prepared meal without fear of attack. At Tonu, in Southern Bougainville, the people told of Taani Palavi, a Tongan missionary who had prepared a feast soon after his arrival and invited all the people to partake of it. According to their account, it was the first time in the history of Tonu that men and women had eaten a meal together in public. The following Christmas the people of Tonu prepared a big feast under Taani Palavi's direction, and he invited the leaders of the Roman Catholic faction in the area, with whom the Methodists had not been on speaking terms, to participate. Feasting Polynesian style has now become traditional throughout these areas of Melanesia (Latukefu, 1978, pp. 102-3).

In this way feasts have become inextricably bound up with the Torres Strait Islander's version of Christianity, and it is hard for Islanders to perceive of Christianity without feasts. Non-Islander churchmen on the other hand tend to view feasting as an interesting adjunct to worship, not as an integral part of the whole.

The church's need for money also reinforces the present pattern of feasts. Individuals find it difficult to give large weekly donations, but when the contribution will also provide nutritional food, a time of celebration, and the opportunity to fulfill obligations or gain prestige, then people are willing to contribute.

Another factor reinforcing the present pattern of feasts is the fear of retribution from priest and family. If drinking, which the priest disapproves of, is suggested for a feast, then he may threaten not to come to a feast. If he is not present, the feasts for infant baptism, marriage, funeral, tombstone opening, blessing of house, and blessing of outboard motor and dinghy will not be able to commence. His presence is rarely if ever withheld, but the threat of this would be strong motivation for people to maintain good relationships with the church by good standards of behaviour and by participating in church functions. This kind of power in the hands of priests is now declining, leaving behind a degree of moral confusion. If a community is without a priest for a long time, deacons assume many of the functions of a priest. During a priest's short absence people prefer to postpone many events until his return.

The fear of retribution from family also motivates the continuation of participation in feasts. This fear is seen in those who live away from home. Unless a person has made regular contributions to feasts, the person is afraid or ashamed to go home. When returning home the person will be sure to give a large contribution for a feast. There is also fear of retribution from the spirits of those who have died. If adequate feasts are not given on the dead person's behalf, then his spirit may not go to rest in the world of the dead and may cause much trouble in this world. Many common misadventures are blamed on a spirit which is not satisfied, and there is a great fear that an unsatisfied spirit will steal the spirit of a sick person during sleep.

It has been shown that feasts are more than celebrations. They are necessary for fulfilling obligations to the church, such as raising money for various funds, providing for the needs of the priest, and appeasing God. Obligations to the family are also fulfilled or built up by contributing to feasts. Since obligations to the family are built on reciprocal relationships, an individual will always be in the process of either giving or receiving assistance from another family member. Thus, feasts in their present forms are likely to continue due to the church's historic connection with feasting and the fear of retribution from family and church if obligations are not met in feasts.

4.0 Stress

Feasts are a time of celebration, but in their present forms they are producing cultural stress due to their size and quantity. This stress is becoming evident in marriage, in the lack of development on the islands, and in the relationships between educated workers and their families. It is also possible to see how stress could develop between the church and the people.

4.1 Marriage

Stress is most evident today in marriage. The necessity of celebrating each major life event with a feast, and the fact that tombstone opening feasts are so expensive, have been contributing to the stress on marriage. Obligations to the dead are always given priority over the living because of the difficulties that the spirit of a dead person can cause. Thus young people who would like to be married are often told to wait until after an upcoming tombstone opening because the cost of providing for a wedding feast might delay fulfilling obligations to a deceased person. This may mean a wait of one or two years for young people.

The required feasts, the lack of housing, the custom of eldest child marrying first, the breakdown of sister exchange, and the consequent fear of parents not being cared for in old age have all caused stress that has pushed the age of marriage for women to thirty years or more. With the rise of the marriage age there is a corresponding rise in illegitimate births and elopement, neither of which are socially accepted.

4.2 Development

The great amount of money and time spent on feasts has helped to contribute to the lack of economic development on the islands. The cost of store-bought food for an important open feast, not including meat, may be several hundred dollars. With a minimum of eight important feasts a year, many thousands of dollars are being spent on open feasts.

Important closed feasts have similar costs as well as the cost of numerous cash gifts to church, priest, and relatives. An estimated cost of one funeral was $3700.00 (1980), and tombstone openings are more expensive than this since more people come. The Annual Church Bazaar takes another $5000.00 out of circulation, while all smaller feasts require payment as well.

With these large amounts of money, time, and produce being spent on feasts, it is understandable that there is not much development of small businesses and other money-producing occupations. As a result, the major source of income on Saibai Island continues to be social services, while the major expenditures are feasts. Feasts are not, of course, the only reason for lack of development, but neither do they encourage it now that the islands depend on a cash economy.[3]

4.3 Educated Young People

Stress is being produced between educated young people and their families. These educated young people are becoming a part of the western culture. If at the same time they wish to maintain their family ties, they must give up financial independence and send contributions back home. If they decide not to send contributions, or are unable to send them due to financial difficulties, they are ashamed and tend not to go back to see their families. In this way, feasts and the necessity of contributing to them are producing stress between generations.

4.4 Church

Stress is not yet evident between the people and the church, but it is easy to speculate about how this could arise. As the younger people become more westernized and want to see material progress and development, resentment may grow toward the church. Younger people could easily blame the church for the lack of money and time. Many feasts are church calendar events and gifts are given to the church. Thus the relationship between the people and the church may be viewed as nonreciprocal since the people continually do things for the church and there is no tangible evidence that the church is doing anything to improve the people's material well-being.

5.0 Conclusion

Feasts are an integral part of the Kala Lagaw culture of Saibai Island. As a time of celebration, feasts unite families and provide a meaningful use of free time and creativity. These same feasts, however, are producing stress in marriage, between generations, and contributing to the lack of economic development. The results of this stress can be seen in increased illegitimate births and elopement, the breaking off of family ties, and an economy whose main source of income is social services. This stress appears to correlate with size and quantity of feasts. At this time there is no foreseeable change in the present pattern of feasts since the pattern is being reinforced by the sanctioning presence of the church[4] and the fear of retribution if obligations are not fulfilled.

If the present trend of young people towards westernization continues, there may also be stress produced between the people and the church. The blame for lack of economic development may easily be attributed to the church since the church is reinforcing the continuation of the present pattern of feasts which limits time and money for economic development. It will be important for the church to analyze its role in the feasts, for example, its role in the tombstone opening which is a ceremony that appears to give priority to death at the expense of life. This role will affect the church's future influence on the people. Both the beneficial and the stress-producing effects of feasts will need to be carefully weighed.

NOTES

1. This paper is based on field research from 1976 to 1981 by Rod and Judy Kennedy under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Judy Kennedy contributed the content of the paper and was assisted in writing by Martha Wade.

2. The situation with the Anglican Church has now changed in that islands which have stipendiary priests are now responsible to pay a large part of their own priest's salary.

3. Contrast what Mr Anau of Boigu Island says of the positive relationship of feasting to the old subsistence economy in 'Working Together, Helping Each Other' (see this volume).

4. Since the writing of this paper, the church has modified its sanctioning of feasts and has urged greater moderation in the scale of feasts held.

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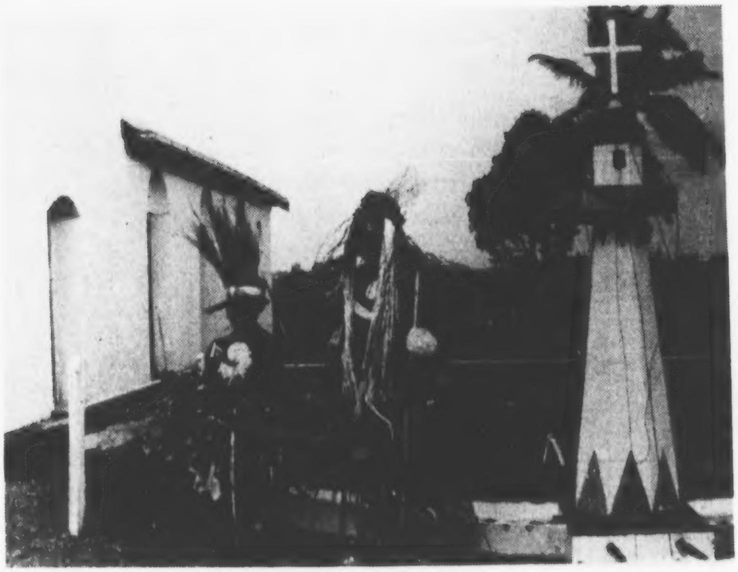
COMING OF THE LIGHT FESTIVAL:

a re-enactment of the arrival of the Lifu Island missionaries on Saibai Island

Women and children hiding from the 'invaders' (the Lifuan missionaries).

The Lifuan missionaries arrive, with the 'branch of peace' held aloft by their chief.

The Lifuan missionaries surrounded by Saibai warriors.



Coming of the Light Festival:
the symbolic breaking of weapons of war

THE INTERMEDIARY AND SOCIAL DISTANCE IN WESTERN TORRES STRAIT[1]

Rod Kennedy

0. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the role of the intermediary as one who helps preserve harmony within the society of the Western Torres Strait Islanders.[2] A dominant concern of the Islander is the smooth interaction with the people around him. For this reason the role of the intermediary between individuals has great importance in the daily life of the people, since they tend to retain a high reserve with non-intimates for a great length of time. The intermediary acts as an initial go-between, preventing sudden accidental expression of sharply contrary wishes.

The Kala Lagaw society of the Western Torres Strait is basically integrated around three types of groups: sibling, filial, and inter-clan. There is the tendency for people to be open to social interaction in sibling groups while guarding against personal vulnerability as more outsiders are involved (see table).

Sibling groups are noted for their intimacy of interaction. Anything keeping siblings apart is seen as undesirable. They will share freely, with the exchange of goods tending toward generalized reciprocity. Sibling groups contain mechanisms which encourage the individual to work to fulfill his obligations or, alternatively, for him to withdraw temporarily from the filial group.

Filial, or clan, groups are only a little less intimate than sibling groups. While there is much freedom to interact within filial groups, interaction is more limited than for sibling groups. Requirements for mediation exist where conditions for comfortable social interaction are critical. The society monitors reciprocity at this level through role-defined expectations.

Inter-clan groups maintain a much greater degree of social distance and depend on specific reciprocity as a social device to monitor exhange. Interactions at this level are more restricted. An intermediary is needed to facilitate a degree of interaction with people outside the clan.

The structure of these three types of groups is never completely rigid. For example, people do have close relatives and friends in other clans. With some of these they tend to display sibling or filial group behaviour rather than inter-clan behaviour. Today, a breakdown of inter-clan barriers is occurring among more educated Islanders, for whom belonging to the same ethnic group is beginning to assume the functional equivalence of common clan membership.

The skill of the intermediary lies in supporting the deep sharing of values and assumptions within a tightly integrated system. The need to encourage unity is fulfilled by close adherence to expected role behaviour. The mediator filters interpersonal communications and influences the parties involved to express their views to each other within the context of their respective status-defined roles. There is much dependence on interpersonal

Willingness of Kala Lagaw people to interact according to social grouping

DEGREE OF INTERACTION	TYPE OF GROUP		
	SIBLING	FILIAL/CLAN	VILLAGE OR BEYOND
Commitment to the common good	unlimited	unlimited	limited
Motives for acting for common good	to prove performance is acceptable	to fulfill reciprocal role requirements	specific reciprocity; to increase indebtedness
Willingness to expose personality through well-known initiatives to work or learn	very willing	high status: very willing; low status: cautious of infringing elders' status	high status, specialist mediator: willing; all others: cautious of infringing specialist's status
Willingness to be seen as taking innovative initiatives	very willing	very unwilling; high status sibling group: collectively willing	very unwilling; clan group: collectively very willing

mediation to accomplish transactions with outsiders and with persons perceived to be of higher rank.

Avoidance of confrontation may not be necessary in Kala Lagaw society. When direct confrontation is acceptable, an intermediary is not, of course, required. When confrontation is to be avoided, an intermediary may or may not be required. The remainder of this paper discusses case studies which illustrate these types of situations.

1. UNACCEPTABLE CONFRONTATION

1.1 PRESENCE OF INTERMEDIARY

Each of the following nine case studies focuses on the service of the mediator as a preserver of smooth interpersonal relations in the Kala Lagaw society. The need for mediation arises in the following instances:

1) when serious business is involved (case studies 1 and 2)

2) when the initiator is of lower rank than the person to whom the transaction is directed (case studies 3 through 6)

3) when the parties are comparative strangers (case study 7)

4) when previous interpersonal conflict has occurred between the parties (case study 8)

5) when there is the probability of conflict of interest (case study 9)

CASE STUDIES 1 AND 2: SERIOUS BUSINESS

In the vast majority of day to day transactions, no mediation is required between parents and children. However, when there is important business to transact, an intermediary is called in.

Case Study 1: Negotiation of a Marriage

> A young man who is romantically interested in a girl may not traditionally tell her so directly. He is restricted to such indirect means as using love charms on his body. The young woman is also limited in direct communication and passes word to the young man via one of her close associates that she likes him. If the interest is mutual, then the friend of the girl becomes an intermediary to arrange for the couple to meet secretly. When the young couple wishes to marry, each will go to a close clan sibling of his or her parents, asking the relative to ask the parents to give favourable consideration to the union. It then becomes the parents' prerogative to talk over the possible marriage with their child and if they are in agreement with the couple, they will institute negotiations with their own siblings and with the parents of the other party.

It is significant that while young people speak very openly with parents about mundane matters, they do not initiate conversations about such important and potentially controversial matters as choice of a marriage partner. The use of an intermediary shields the young person from potential shame, since he or she will experience shame if the plan is openly repudiated. The use of the intermediary gives the couple the hope that the older relative will, through his personal relationship with the parents, gently persuade them to look favourably on the request. Interestingly enough, a younger sibling of the parents is just as likely to dissuade the parents from agreeing to the marriage as he is to encourage the arrangement.

Case Study 2: Bad News

> If a relative dies while living in some other place, news will first be sent to the relevant clan leader for the village, who summons all the relatives, simply telling them that there is some bad news. After all the relatives have gathered, the clan leader begins to recite the good qualities of the deceased. He doesn't give his name until everyone has had ample opportunity to guess his identity. It is regarded as a very serious matter to break this protocol.

This custom is important because it avoids giving people a sudden shock. In addition to sadness at losing a relative, Torres Strait people have many detailed beliefs concerning their mutual interaction with the spirits of departed relatives. The prescribed procedure of community leader serving as intermediary allows the group to adjust to their new relationship with this relative who now has spirit status.

CASE STUDIES 3-6: INITIATOR OF LOWER RANK

It would be wrong to overemphasize the negative reasons for dependence on intermediaries. Besides the need to avoid socially unacceptable confrontations, the procedure serves a positive social function. It clearly indicates a recognition of the status and role of the intermediary and of the person ultimately approached. Paying honour to these people promotes social cohesion, reinforcing the existing social structure.

Case Study 3: The Christian Enquirer and the Clergyman

> A large number of church people had been involved in a renewal movement fully supported and encouraged by the white clergyman. A young man wanted to speak to this higher ranking white clergyman about his desire to have greater personal involvement in the movement. He was on good speaking terms with the clergyman, since he knew him quite well. However, he still chose to ask the clergyman's wife to mediate his request of her husband to grant him an interview. The clergyman found this somewhat unacceptable, fearing that the young man might be somewhat half-hearted about his desire for deeper involvement. However, when the white clergyman made enquiries of an Islander clergyman, it became evident that it would be very difficult for a young Islander to approach him directly about such matters.

Case Study 4: The Workman Who Took a Low Profile in His Job

> Two white nursing sisters employed by the government to work in the Torres Strait were having maintenance difficulties with the small diesel-powered boat used to carry them to different islands to hold clinics. A young Islander worked as a tractor driver and airstrip maintenance man employed by the same government department as the sisters. Though he was a capable mechanic and generally an active, obliging person, he did not offer to help them. Finally I went to help, and as I was cleaning up oil spilled on the boat, the young man came and asked me to see the island chairman on his behalf to ask him if it would be all right if he, the young man, were to help fix the boat.

At least three factors caused this man to use me as an intermediary:

1) he belonged to a different clan from the chairman

2) Islanders are far more hesitant than whites about offering suggestions to a person which may infringe the prerogatives of his public office

3) the young man in question was many years junior to the chairman

It is very probable that the young man would have approached the chairman directly had he belonged to the chairman's clan or one more closely associated with it, had his age status been higher, or had there been no expectation that the chairman would take initiative.

Case Study 5: The Honoured Teacher

> A lecturer in linguistics and his wife, both skilled cross-cultural communicators, spent six weeks on Saibai Island teaching a course. Some of the students in the course had previously had extended association with the couple in a non-Island context and had related closely to them. Other students who had not previously known the couple were still quite relaxed in their presence. Notwithstanding these easy friendships, as long as I was there and helping to teach the course, students continually asked me to mediate all manner of minor academic business they needed to transact with the visiting lecturer.

Young people tend to work through an intermediary, even when there is little or no fear of speaking to the higher ranking person directly.

Case Study 6: The Indirect Borrowers

> Whenever many people want to borrow something from me, they neither come themselves nor send a written note; instead they send a younger relative. Young adult males may send a female relative of their own age. Apparently it does not matter if the younger relative is more closely related to the person making the request or the person receiving the request. My children are frequently asked to carry requests to

> me. Women frequently bring requests directly to my wife on their own behalf to ask me for various things.

CASE STUDY 7: INVOLVEMENT WITH STRANGERS

Dealing with strangers indicates another positive need for mediation. Islanders appear to encounter few difficulties in making straightforward purchases from strangers in a normal retail setting where role expectations are rigidly defined. However, they are very disturbed with encounters that entail more ambiguities.

Case Study 7: A "Very Good Friend at the Booking Office"

> One of the Saibai Island leaders was planning to come to Darwin (over 1600 km from Saibai) to work with us on language research. We were making travel plans and discussing whether he would travel alone or with us. Having previously travelled a similar distance to Brisbane, he had no fear of plane travel itself but very considerable fear of having to make a flight connection in a city he had never visited before. He said that he had no fear at the small flight booking office in a nearby town, because the lady who always took care of his needs was his very good friend. Since that time the gentleman has travelled more and feels quite easy about approaching desk attendants at an airline terminal, now that he perceives their role behaviour as predictable. He often acts as an intermediary for relatives in this type of situation.

There are considerable similarities between Islander reaction to a strange situation and the reaction of Westerners who may be very unfamiliar with airline travel arrangements. However, the essential difference between them lies in the greater tendency among Islanders to stress dependence on a chain of persons to achieve some end. The Westerner tends to stress the possession of more abstract information and generalized skills.

CASE STUDY 8: PREVIOUS INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

There is a tendency to rely on an intermediary when interpersonal conflict has previously taken place.

Case Study 8: A Father Angered

> Approximately six months after we went to live in the islands, two young boys, ages 7 and 10, took a builder's tape measure from our house and smashed it between two rocks. I became angry and insisted that the two boys come with me to their father, something I learned later to be very uncultural. The boys came very unwillingly and when we finally reached their father, he became extremely angry with me. As a result I did not try to pursue the matter further. That evening a cousin of the father visited me and after a great deal of very general but friendly preamble told me that it was his desire to fix up any trouble and that they were sorry that his relative had expressed his anger toward me. The intermediary arranged for me to meet his relatives the next day near the intermediary's house. The conciliatory meeting took place the next day, and since that time, the father of the boys has continued to be friendly toward me.

This was a case where both the boys' father and I were guilty of moderately serious breaches of the local social code.[3]

CASE STUDY 9: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Whenever there is potential conflict of interest, there is need for the services of an intermediary. While this need is undoubtedly present in marriage negotiations today, it also arose when the first missionaries came to various parts of the Torres Strait. The significance of intermediaries in the introduction of Christianity and the acceptance of the first missionaries can be seen both historically and in the way that this history is re-enacted each year. Islanders portray the highlights of the roles of various intermediaries.

Case Study 9: Friends of the Missionaries

> Both oral and written histories tell how Jawai, a Mabuiag Island man, worked for European shell fishermen, then later came to live on Dauan Island. When the mission schooner of the London Missionary Society visited Dauan on 6 July 1873, they depended heavily on Jawai to ensure their peaceful acceptance. In the Dauan Islander's annual re-enactment of this scene, all the warriors are depicted as lying in wait in the men's house while Jawai ventures closer to the shore to see who the visitors are. Later he welcomes the visitors and barely manages to restrain the other warriors from attacking them. The Saibai re-enactment is very similar. Jawai and a Saibai Island clan leader, Nadai, both feature prominently as the intermediaries who smoothed the way. On Boigu Island an oral version features *ipi pawdh*, the traditional custom of lending a wife to a group of men of an opposing faction. They attacked the canoe bringing the party of Lifu Island[4] missionaries, but then a Dauan man who had had contact with these warriors called out to them and persuaded them to negotiate, and then lent them his second wife for the day. More than a hundred years of Christian teaching notwithstanding, the old men who tell this story speak very highly of the man's action in establishing peace by lending his wife.

1.2 LACK OF INTERMEDIARY

While the presence of an intermediary is essential in a number of instances of unacceptable confrontation, there are other instances of unacceptable confrontation in which the intermediary is lacking. These include avoidance through either physical or referential means.

CASE STUDY 10: PHYSICAL AVOIDANCE

Case Study 10: The Man Who Didn't See the Argument

> Soon after we went to live on Saibai Island I was surprised to see a friend emerging from the swamp on his way to church. He explained to me that when he observed two men having an argument, he took a detour so that he would not see them.

Islanders are skilled at not being at a place where their presence could cause embarrassment. After my friend's explanation I went on my way pondering the range of meanings of the verb "to see" and its language equivalent.

CASE STUDY 11: REFERENTIAL AVOIDANCE

Case Study 11: Specific Criticism Avoided

> The dismissal of church on a Sunday morning and the Sunday afternoon meeting held once each month for about three hours are each opportunities for leaders to deliver speeches of admonition to the community. Young adults are usually denounced quite vigorously, while older persons are denounced in a more general and less forceful manner.
>
> There is also a great deal of caution about being the first to offer criticism. At one such meeting there had been strong criticism of excessive drinking and drunkenness. After about one hour I stood up and ventured the opinion that the black marketing of alcohol was even more worthy of condemnation than individual weakness with respect to alcohol. Immediately after this the priest and several other church leaders expanded on these sentiments at considerable length.
>
> I asked an Islander friend later why no one had previously mentioned black market selling of alcohol. I was told that the priest (also an Islander) had to use indirect modes of reference, *adhiaw ya* "outside talk", lest he insult people. The person responsible for the black marketing was a close relative of an important man in the village. In this particular case, however, a great many people were very dissatisfied with his behaviour and were just on the verge of criticizing his behaviour publicly. Of course his name was never mentioned in the meeting.[5]

Islanders exercise much greater liberty than do Westerners in making very general social criticisms. It is the role of one of the lay church elders to do this, although naming offenders is a much more serious matter. The attitudes and values exhibited by Islanders are very different from those exhibited by many Westerners who hold strongly to the view that it is better to have open, rather than secret, expressions of criticism. While critical rumours circulate freely in Kala Lagaw culture, these tend to provoke no public response unless some prestigious aggrieved party feels that he has been publically affronted.

2. ACCEPTABLE CONFRONTATION

All the examples given so far in this paper relate to the use of the intermediary to maintain smooth interpersonal relations in social interaction and to avoid confrontation. This may be described as maintaining proper social distance. In order to produce a more balanced picture of the Kala Lagaw people, it is equally important to look at contrastive situations where it is not necessary to maintain social distance. In a similar way, some of the dynamics of Kala Lagaw society are presented in contrasting situations where social intimacy is emphasized.

2.1 BORROWING WITHIN FAMILY

Case Study 12: Direct Borrowers

> Some people always ask me personally to borrow something, or else if they send a youngster to me with a message, it is always a polite note written by the older person. If, as is often the case, the person making the request has first seen me away from my house and made all necessary arrangements, then he may send a younger messenger without any written note. Most people who conduct requests in this way also give us presents from time to time without being asked. They engage in close relationship behaviour, always using appropriate kinship terms of themselves and myself whether the request comes by word of mouth or by letter, and they freely express pleasure for any help received. This is in marked contrast to the behaviour exhibited by the other group of borrowers (see case 6) whose behaviour is more like that of people buying, selling, or receiving wages, never expressing overt pleasure at the time of the transaction.

People who borrow from me indirectly seem to consider themselves either not my close associates or of lower status than I am. They are nearly all women, younger men, or a few older men with whom I have not been closely associated (see case studies 3 through 6, the use of an intermediary between lower and higher status). Those, on the other hand, who are careful only to borrow by direct request are mostly older men. But they also include two older women, both of whom stand in a mother relationship to me according to my adoption, in addition to men of my own age or a little younger with whom I have a particularly close association as a clan brother.

It is important to compare and contrast the two patterns of mediated and unmediated borrowing behaviour. Whereas mediated borrowing (see case 6) maintains social distance and is similar to a purchase or wage agreement, unmediated or direct borrowing (see case 11) maintains social intimacy and is an expression of sharing between close associates.

Mediated borrowing behaviour can further be compared with mediated behaviour in general. In both kinds, the person of low status avoids the danger of direct confrontation with persons of higher status, requests by distant associates to borrow consumables is frequently refused, and the intermediary is supposedly unconcerned as to whether or not the request is granted. The difference between the two types of mediated behaviour is seen in the tendency for the intermediary in the borrowing behaviour to be of lower status than either of the parties, while in other behaviour he is generally of higher status than the initiator.

2.2 AGE MATE RELATIONSHIPS

Cohesiveness within clans is a basic cultural value held to be very important by the Kala Lagaw people. People of one clan tend to live in one locality, and in pre-mission times each clan would live in its own separate hamlet. People very stongly feel the need to patch up any quarrels between close relatives as quickly as possible. Relationships are especially close between age mates within a clan and closest of all between clan siblings of the same sex. This cohesiveness must be seen as having important survival value for the community. We may relate this to the obligatory absence of mediation between age mates. Intimate fellowship among young age mates tends to be accompanied with quite a lot of vigorous horseplay, but close fellowship between older groups of age mates is expressed in ways that reflect more of mutual honour and respect. A strong feature of age mate behaviour within a clan or a functional clan is the great freedom of exchange and giving. Islanders seem to practise specific reciprocity among less intimate associates and a freer type of generalized reciprocity among very close associates.

The very pattern of kinship structure lends itself to the discretionary extension of kin relationships to their practical limits under the circumstances. More clan sibling relationships may be developed if need arises. The children of one generation of male forebears on father's side and female forebears on mother's side are all regarded as siblings. W. H. R. Rivers sought to explore how men defined their set of "brothers" under this scheme. (In Rivers' data collected on Mabuiag Island, the term for "sibling of the same sex" is *tukoiab*; the Kala Lagaw term is *tukuyap*.) He found that if two people were by our reckoning third or fourth cousins and had few dealings with each other, then one could describe the other as a "little bit *tukoiab*", thus suggesting that a relationship exists in embryo framework but has not been developed (Rivers 1904:129-32).

In many aspects of Torres Strait life, people demonstrate a strong tendency to relate very closely with age mates of their own clan (and to relate only a little less closely to relatives junior or senior to themselves).[6] Case studies 13-16 illustrate age mate relationships in the areas of work, competition, relaxation, and obligations.

WORK

Case Study 13: Fettlers Gang

> It is fairly common for a group of Islander clan brothers to all find employment in the same fettlers gang, maintaining railway lines as far away as Mount Isa in the far west of Queensland. These men will often comprise the entire gang. They tend to retain their traditional language even when separated from their home community for many years. These groups of workers have been highly regarded by their employers and have a reputation for coping well with the harsh climate.

When people work together on a common project such as repairing the church, the same people like to spend their evenings relaxing together around a fire. Even during the daytime, family social and eating arrangements tend to surround the work activity, and work and recreation are mixed. The people who tend to form one group for this purpose are the same people who tend to act as a single group for exchange and mutual assistance purposes. The group tends to be one clan with all the males having the same totem, but various relatives such as sons-in-law may attach to the group. I have been told that until the time of the Second World War food gardening was performed by large family groups who worked and relaxed together in this way. The extent of food gardening declined sharply as soon as this practice dropped out. Of course, during the war most of the able bodied young men were away and this trend has continued as young men seek outside cash employment, but clearly there are numbers who remain on the island but play no active part in food gardening.

Any task, however, which the young men attack with vim and gusto is almost invariably performed by a group of age mates and these tend to come from one clan. These tasks include outside employment, in addition to hunting, village projects, preparing small temporary shelters, and decorating them for feasts. Though the trend is not quite so pronounced, women of the various age groups and older men also show a strong preference for working as a clan-based group of age mates. A frequent reason for working in these groupings is the preparation for the very large number of extended family and community feasts.

Since people have come to depend more on social welfare payments and proportionately less on hunting and subsistence agriculture, it may well be that clan-based groups of age mates working together to prepare feasts fulfills part of the need for intra-clan cohesiveness which used to be supplied by the social organization of hunting and food gardening. Nevertheless, hunting and fishing are still relatively important clan activities. Co-operation by hunters is important as is sharing of the kill or the catch.

COMPETITION

Case Study 14: A Boat Crew of Clan Brothers

> Clan brothers tend to gravitate toward each other in employment, so that on a cargo boat in the Torres Strait it is very common to find many of the crewmen coming from one island and all close relatives. As boxes and cans of groceries are hurled from hand to hand during the unloading from ship's hold to dinghy, the pace is very rapid. Anyone who cannot catch flour tins as rapidly as they are thrown to him is made to feel a weakling. The number of dented flour cans arriving at the village food stores is clear evidence of the vigour of these competitions.

One can see further evidence of the intimacy of intra-clan cohesiveness within one age group of the same sex by observing the manner in which age mates compete with each other as they work or hunt together. Whereas Western youth tend to compete to establish winners, Torres Strait youth tend to put pressure on each other by challenging each other to keep up with the others in the group. Interpersonal competition takes the form of numerous small competitions between pairs of individuals. Whereas the Westerner has a greater tendency to compete to achieve the temporary status of winner which he enjoys in relatively deliberate isolation, the Islander engages in a type of competition which is intensely interpersonal. He who finally emerges as the most prestigious within a group has related to each person within that group in numerous small duels.[7]

RELAXATION

The tendency to be able to work well as a group of clan brothers or clan sisters appears to have application to other parts of the South Pacific.

Case Study 15: The Jovial Sugar Growers

> Captain Louis Hope, the first to grow sugar cane commercially in Queensland, is said to have had above average success with labour relations and productivity on his plantation. His success is largely attributed to the carnival atmosphere he maintained in the work environment. Young workmen from the island would laugh and joke together and vie to see who could drive a steam plow to the end of the furrow soonest.

This is very much the preferred work pattern for Islanders. While elders in Western society may frown upon young Westerners who engage in the behaviour of turning work into a kind of game, older Islanders, on the other hand, strongly commend the practice and remark that if young fellows are happy and in a joking mood, then they will work well. Islanders have a strong dislike for working alone, and their feelings against such a practice are so strong that they express sympathy for me should I be doing any manual labour alone.

OBLIGATIONS

Case Study 16: Relatives Far Away

> On a number of occasions I have offered to record a short message on cassette from Islanders who have been absent from home for a long time. I have visited them in mainland cities and would be able to carry the cassette to a brother or sister back in the Islands. Initially they have refused, protesting that the speaker felt a little ashamed at having been away from his people for so long and therefore somewhat ashamed to send a message. But then we usually show them pictures of people from their home island and of their relatives, the ones to whom they might want to send a recorded message. Those persons who have initially declined the offer now express a strong desire to be reunited with relatives and ask to be able to record a message to their siblings, after all. Relatives who have attended to kinship obligations in spite of great geographical separation show no hesitation about sending cassette messages, since cassette recorders have become a large part of Islander life and are not mysterious or frightening.

Whereas Islanders show a strong desire to draw relatives back to their traditional homes and are prepare to spend large amounts of money for fares if necessary, accounts are kept concerning the extent to which traditional obligations have been performed. People who have missed out on performing certain obligations lose status as a result. For example, relatives will debate who is to control a piece of land. I have heard one party say that because a potential clan leader was absent from the funeral of the previous clan leader, he failed to carry out certain duties. Therefore authority to distribute clan assets fell upon those who were present at the funeral and they were the ones who now carried out duties which would have fallen to the one who was absent.

2.3 SOCIAL ERRORS

Case Study 17: Drunk in Public

> If men become intoxicated they are apt to become argumentative. In semi-private situations there may be vigorous arguments, but in public this is rarely the case. The public drunk tends to resort to oratory and self aggrandizement. It seems that the public challenging of the positions of others is viewed so seriously by Islanders that even intoxicated persons remember not to do this. Relatives of the intoxicated person try to lead him away as quietly as possible. Later they may have a great deal to say to him, but their first objective is to minimize any public scene.

Kala Lagaw people do not like to lose face in public and thereby be shown to be vulnerable. A great deal of respect is paid to persons and the roles ascribed to them, so people place a high priority on not publicly challenging each other's roles. The behaviour of both the intoxicated person and his relatives fits this pattern.

Case Study 18: Mother-daughter Conflict

> When an Island girl took an evening stroll with a visiting workman, the girl's mother did not approve and so whipped her around the legs with the nearest handy object. The daughter immediately ran away and spent three days with relatives at the other end of the village before returning home.

Within one family, if a higher status person is sufficiently annoyed, he will confront a younger person, but it is normal for the younger person to withdraw from the situation as quickly as socially possible.

Case Study 19: Members of the Girls Friendly Society Criticized

> A situation similar to that in Case 18 arose involving a number of local girls with visiting workers. The older women (the Mothers Union, an organization of the Church) all gathered and required the members of the Girls Friendly Society (junior equivalent of the Mothers Union) to gather before them to be publicly shamed for their behaviour. No men were present. Some of the young women, especially those over 30 years old and those who had received formal education beyond secondary school, tried to offer some sort of verbal defence. Any of the younger women who tried to defend themselves were verbally attacked in the most virulent terms by the higher status married women.[8] The higher status women, those entitled to speak, raised all manner of accusations. Even those single women who were not accused of anything reported later that they tended to be very fearful lest they be criticized and that they kept their eyes on the ground so as not to attract unfavourable attention. The young woman against whom most accusations were focused chose to leave the island for several months to live with relatives in another town.

We see that high status people will occasionally make criticisms of lower status people, causing a tendency for the lower status person to feel strong shame and to withdraw.

People also tend to withdraw from a community if they find themselves in strong conflict with the local chairman or if, in the eyes of the local community, they have been guilty of serious misconduct. Strong open criticism rarely occurs. When it does, it usually involves higher status people criticizing their own lower status relatives and generally results in a degree of social withdrawal by the person criticized.

3. CONCLUSION

The Kala Lagaw society of the Western Torres Strait is characterized by the presence of the intermediary whose role is to help preserve harmony and support shared values within the society. The Kala Lagaw people are very aware of the aspect of personal confrontation and of the obligations that are a part of the confrontation process. There are times when it is very important to avoid interpersonal confrontation. Some of these times warrant the presence of an intermediary, while some do not. An intermediary is necessary when serious business is inolved, or when the initiator of a confrontation is of lower rank than the other party, or when a type of conflict is involved. Intermediaries are not necessary if one can avoid interpersonal confrontation through mere physical or referential avoidance.

There are also times when interpersonal confrontation is acceptable. These include borrowing within the family, age mate relationships, and times of reprimanding due to social errors.

The intermediary filters interpersonal communications and influences the parties involved to express their views to each other within the context of their respective status-defined roles.

Mediation is seen as a vital factor in the smooth running of many aspects of life. An appropriate balance between mediated and non-mediated relationships contributes greatly towards effective social cohesion and also allows tensions within the society which can be effective motivators enabling the society to provide for its own needs. Any program aimed at producing social change within the Torres Strait is unlikely to be fully effective unless full account is taken of clan group structure and accepted patterns of mediation.

NOTES

1. This paper was written as part of a sociolinguistics course held in Papua New Guinea in 1981. The course was jointly sponsored by the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the University of Texas at Arlington. As a field linguist with SIL, I have conducted research on Saibai Island for various periods since 1976.

2. While there are important cultural similarities among all Torres Strait Islanders, my own research has been among the western Islanders only. Therefore references throughout the paper to Islanders refer primarily to those from the western islands.

3. I feel that I received fairly generous treatment because the church enjoys high prestige in the islands and as a translator I am associated with the church. Had I not enjoyed this prestige, there would have been less concern to heal the breach quickly.

4. Early mission teachers to the Torres Strait came from Lifu (Lifou) the largest of the Loyalty Islands 100 km east of New Caledonia.

5. It is moderately uncommon for young adults to be named in a public meeting by way of criticism of their behaviour, and I have never heard a senior adult named in a public meeting by way of critical accusation. I have heard only one instance of a senior adult named by way of admission of responsibility as a result of accusation. This occurred only after the meeting had been drawn out for two extra hours.

6. The society, however, demands a lesser degree of intimacy in what we may term vertical relationships or filial relationships within a clan. The need for mediation in these relationships in the case of a very important issue such as marriage has already been pointed out.

7. This pattern of competition may be widespread in Western cultures also: note the tendency among sportsmen to revert to interpersonal dueling even in team games. The significance of this behaviour among Torres Strait Islanders is that this possibly universal behaviour takes place so readily within a group of same-sex age mates within a clan.

8. Single women are accorded low status because they are unmarried. Any attempt on their part to answer criticism evokes more serious criticism than does the original incident. Low status people, whose status is temporarily lower because of an incident, are distressed by open opposition of high status people. This is a natural corollary of Kala Lagaw people belonging to a non-confrontation, mediation culture.

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